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# VOICE AND SILENCE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.- AMERICAN CLASSROOM: TOWARDS A DIALOGIC AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO VOICE, SILENCE, AND ACTIVE LISTENING

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VOICE AND SILENCE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.-  
AMERICAN CLASSROOM: TOWARDS A DIALOGIC AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO  
VOICE, SILENCE, AND ACTIVE LISTENING

by

Jana Simonis

B.A., Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, 2009

M.A., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2012

A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Communication Studies  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 2016

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

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for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Communication Studies

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March 28, 2016

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

JANA SIMONIS, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in COMMUNICATION STUDIES,  
presented on March 28, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: VOICE AND SILENCE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.-  
AMERICAN CLASSROOM: TOWARDS A DIALOGIC AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO  
VOICE, SILENCE, AND ACTIVE LISTENING

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Nilanjana R. Bardhan

Each year, thousands of international students move to the United States to pursue higher education. Over the past few years in particular, the numbers of international students enrolled at U.S.-American universities has been on a constant incline. Two of the biggest changes that international students may experience are the different expectations of classroom etiquette and participation in the U.S.-American classroom setting. Impacted by many years of exposure to West-centric approaches to pedagogical praxis, the U.S.-American classroom has been created as a privileged space in which, more often than not, West-centric epistemologies, approaches to pedagogy, and ways of knowledge production are privileged over others. For international students, the majority of whom do not come from Western cultures, this can be a very tough space to negotiate.

In this dissertation, I look at the conceptualizations of voice and silence, in particular, in order to gain a better understanding of how these two concepts are experienced and negotiated by international students within the U.S.-American classroom setting at a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country. While many West-centric cultures conceptualize voice and silence as dichotomous, I argue that they form a continuum that is dialogic, communicative, fluid, contextual, and at times paradoxical. Furthermore, I argue that the meanings of silence and voice within the U.S.-American classroom

space can have multiple meanings and be understood as different forms of communication and participation.

For the purpose of this project, I selected the three meta discourses of postcolonial theory, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research to help deconstruct the notion of international students as the “Other,” as well as the misconceptions of silence within the classroom. Postcolonial theory as the main anchor of this research, in particular, allowed me to engage in an in-depth discussion of how we can decolonize West-centric, U.S.-American classrooms and create more dialogic, inclusive, and intercultural spaces in which different epistemologies and ways of knowing and knowledge production can be included. Furthermore, I bring into dialogue the three selected meta discourses in order to create a more nuanced and inclusive conceptualization of voice and silence that moves away from West-centric binaries.

I used critical complete-member ethnography (CCME), as developed by Dr. Satoshi Toyosaki (2011), as the main method for critical inquiry. CCME argues for the value that is derived from combining different ethnographic methods in order to create an accurate account of cultural practices, as well as “focus on communicative practices and processes” (p. 66). I incorporated an autoethnographic account that functions to position myself as a researcher as well as autoethnographic narratives and reflections throughout my data analysis. In addition, I extend the notion of membership as it is currently conceptualized within CCME to make the argument for CCME as a method for critical inquiry within intercultural communication, and not just intracultural communication, research.

My research findings demonstrate that the West-centric, binaristic conceptualization of voice and silence within the U.S.-American educational system can create unwelcoming learning

environments for international students who may feel positioned as the Other who do not fit in, or may feel excluded from dominant discourse by being silenced. The participants' narratives indicate the meanings of and reasons for international students' embodiments of silence within classroom settings are as multiple, contextual, and dialogic as the conceptualization of silence itself. The collected data support the argument of the complexity and contextuality of voice and silence, and further call for a reconceptualization of voice and silence as acceptable forms of classroom participation. Furthermore, the international student participants identified several reasons as to why they may choose to perform silence in the classroom. Finally, through the interviews I tried to create a dialogue among international students and instructors in order to address and deconstruct issues pertaining to the struggles of international students caused by U.S.-centric approaches to pedagogy as well as conceptualizations of voice, silence, and classroom participation.

My research showed that it is imperative for us to engage in more inclusive, critical, yet compassionate dialogues across our differences in order to create glocalized, intercultural learning communities within U.S./Euro-/West-centric educational systems. We must attempt to create intercultural spaces within our classrooms that allow for and cherish diverse narratives, epistemologies, different ways of knowing, and different conceptualizations of voice, silence, and classroom participation within the U.S.-American classroom setting, in particular at a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country. This dissertation research privileges such dialogue by centering the narratives of international students, thus, moving them from the periphery to the center and allowing them the agency to address exclusionary pedagogical practices within the U.S.-American educational system that exclude them from dominant discourse.

## DEDICATION

To all international students who have ever felt like their voices, epistemologies, narratives, and/or experiences remain unheard. Never forget that you matter.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Silence is a source of great strength. – Lao Tzu (in Sasson, 2012)

Every year, a large number of young adults choose to leave their homes behind and travel to a foreign country to pursue higher education. According to the Institute of International Education, the United States experienced international student enrollment of 886,052 students in the 2013/14 academic year ([www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)). In addition, “2012-2013 saw an increase in international students in the U.S. of 7.2 percent, to 819,644 students from 764,495 students in 2011-2012” (Thomas & Norton, 2013, para. 4). Furthermore, the examined university in this research project “has reached its highest number [of international students] in 20 years” (Daray, 2013, para. 1). International student enrollment at U.S.-American universities has been on an increase for the past few years now, positioning international students as one of the fastest growing populations on university campuses across the United States.

In the summer of 2009, I was one of the young adults who, at the age of 22, decided to move to the United States from Germany to pursue a graduate degree. While, at first, I was enrolled as an undeclared exchange student who could branch out and pick whichever classes she wanted and was to return to her home country after one year, I soon fell in love with the field of Communication Studies and decided to pursue my master’s degree as well as my doctoral degree in the United States. The field of Communication Studies and, in particular, my focus in intercultural communication, challenged me in many different ways and on many different levels. Taking the journey through the critical paradigm and its influences on intercultural communication, and later communication pedagogy, opened my eyes to concepts such as power, privilege, dialogue, social activism, self-reflexivity, etc. As a newcomer, not only in the United

States, but also in a new language, a new department community, a new field of study, and a new research paradigm, I often felt intimidated by the vast knowledge of fellow graduate students that I did not seem to possess yet. In my first year as a master's student, I had my initial experience with the concepts of voice and silence – although, at this point, I didn't know how to name them yet. Thinking back on these first steps I took as a graduate student, I think that part of my interest in this topic stems from this particular time in my life.

Growing up, I was always known as the most talkative and outspoken person in my family. My mother repeatedly told me the story that from the age of two I knew how to recite several fairy tales and stories from memory and there was just no “shutting me up.” This would also not change in the years to come; after all, as a white, Western, able-bodied, heterosexual, agnostic, working class, cisgendered, educated female, I never had to wonder whether or not it was my place to speak – I took that particular privilege for granted. After moving to the United States and experiencing a huge shift in the privileges I had had all of my life, my initial encounter with voice and silence rattled me to the core. From one moment to the next, I was surrounded by people with U.S.-American, English-as-a-first-language, and higher education privilege that I did not have. It was then that I first became aware of the fluidity of identities and identity markers and the ways in which power and privilege operate. The inner shift in power and privilege that I experienced during this initial time resulted in feelings of displacement and questions of belonging (see Simonis, 2012) that further resulted in a self-imposed silencing of myself in the classroom setting.

Speaking from my personal experience, the “German approach” to higher education discourages students from actively engaging in dialogue and classroom discussion, and asking questions was almost a crime because we were supposed to “know better.” Questioning,

interrupting, or even challenging an instructor was considered the worst crime of all. Given this conditioning, coming to the United States and becoming a student in a department where active classroom discussions are encouraged or even expected of students, and asking questions and challenging normative ways of knowing are embraced, was a very new experience for me. I have to admit, it did take some time to get used to this new, more inclusive in my own opinion, approach to learning in higher education. However, the “German” approach and student behavior still was very much ingrained in my entire being. So, for the first couple of semesters, I sat in the classrooms quietly. I would do my readings, take notes, listen carefully and attentively to classroom discussions, take more notes so I would not miss anything and could review the information whenever I needed it, and I would be quiet. Oftentimes, I would be the only student to not verbally participate in the classroom discussions. While my instructors never said anything to me about my silence in the classroom, I felt like I was a disappointment to them. After all, it was expected of me to participate and every day I would make plans to at least say one sentence in class – yet, I would usually fail to do so. I felt ashamed every time I would go to class, disappointing my teachers by not participating, sticking out among my classmates for always just sitting there in silence and writing down notes – I felt like an outsider, like the Other who just didn’t fit in.

It took me almost three semesters until I finally felt comfortable enough to articulate my thoughts and opinions in class. I felt like I was becoming more accustomed to the fast-paced discussions in class, I was now more familiar with the literature and the theories we would talk about, and I had become used to the community of students and faculty. I started to feel like there was a place for me here after all and no longer did I have to self-impose this silence upon myself. I finally felt like I could be myself again and it was an amazing feeling. Coincidentally,



this change happened right around the time when I started my master's thesis research on identity, hybridity, and feelings of displacement among international students. I started to engage more with other international students, and I decided that I wanted to pursue my Ph.D. in Communication Studies. In my second semester as a new Ph.D. student, I had an experience in one of the classes I was taking outside of my department that turned out to be the inspiration behind my entire dissertation research.

**“Classroom Participation is 30 Percent of your Final Grade!”**

In the spring semester of 2013, I enrolled in a seminar during my second semester as a doctoral student and I was starting to find an academic interest in international media studies. I was very excited to learn that the instructor of the course used to be an international student in the U.S. herself before becoming a professor at my university and that I would be one of seven international students in the seminar.

Every class period I sat next to a young woman – a fellow international student from China – who was in her first semester as a master's student and had just arrived in the U.S. a few weeks earlier. Every week we would chat before class and she would always have the biggest smile on her face while telling me how much she was looking forward to this class. During the seminar, she was usually rather quiet, but she would always take pages of notes and would try to connect with the instructor or classmates after class if she had any questions.

About seven weeks into the semester, the instructor stood up in front of the class, held up the syllabus, and announced: “Classroom participation is 30 percent of your final grade! That is a reminder for all of you who do not take part in our discussion – you know who you are!” While she did not say any names, she gave stern looks to a number of people, including my new Chinese friend. I could see the smile disappear from her face and fear appeared to take over her

body. After class, I overheard her talking to the instructor explaining that she did not feel her English was good enough yet to participate in our fast-paced discussions, and that she would always write down her answers first to help her articulate her thoughts better. However, by the time she was done, the discussion had usually moved on already. The instructor showed her little empathy, reminding her that “this is how graduate seminars work.” After this instance, my friend’s behavior changed: the smile disappeared from her face and her eagerness to learn appeared to be replaced with severe nervousness before every class period. While she tried to say at least a few sentences every class after the instructor’s announcement, I could tell that her excitement for engaging with the class was not the same.

It was the observation of this classroom incident which inspired me to look further into how we – as scholars, instructors, students, members of a classroom community – conceptualize and make sense of voice and silence. I was reminded of when I first started out as a master’s student in the U.S.-American classroom and how I, also, chose to remain silent and take extensive notes instead of verbally participating. I could not help but wonder if it had to do with being an international student, if it was due to my German educational background in which verbal participation is interpreted as disrespectful and disruptive, or if there was a different reason as to why I – as well as my Chinese friend – chose to remain silent. It was then that I made the decision to study this phenomenon further and to hopefully contribute to an academic discourse that can disrupt and challenge teaching styles and classroom behaviors that privilege some while marginalizing others.

## **Rationale**

Two of the big questions we are always asked and we ask ourselves as researchers and scholars are why our research matters and how it fits into our field of study. This big “So what?”

question is what I address in this specific section. While the opening narratives already speak to the heuristic value of this study, it is also important to take into consideration the plethora of communication research that has looked at voice and silence over the years.

The debate regarding voice and silence within our discipline has been very polarized over the years. Voice has often been equated with presence and agency whereas silence has often been equated with absence and oppression. Glenn (2004) speaks back to the conceptualization of silence as a “trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, or obedience” (p. 2) and argues that “silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge” (p. 8). The conceptualization of voice and silence as binaristic is a West-centric approach as it privileges one specific type of knowledge and knowledge production. Generally, Western culture (one exception, however, is Finland; see Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985) “equates silence with emptiness or unworthiness” (Kalamaras, 1994, as cited in Glenn, 2004, p. 8) and privileges voice as powerful and a means to exercise agency. As Rowe and Malhotra (2013) point out, “heavily influenced by Western understandings of communication practices, voice has traditionally been elevated as a privileged object of study within these fields” (p. 3). However, many cultures around the globe that do not subscribe to solely Western epistemologies have embraced a view of voice and silence as symbiotic. Silence is regarded as a “space of possibility [...], a space of fluidity, non-linearity, and as a sacred, internal space that provides a refuge – especially for nondominant peoples. Silence is a process that allows one to go within before one has to speak or act” (Rowe & Malhotra, 2013, p. 2). In addition to conceptualizing silence as a positive concept, many non-Western countries have also shifted to focus from silence towards listening. Visweswaran (1994) argues that listening indeed is part of speaking and “if we do not know how to ‘hear’ silence, we cannot apprehend what is being spoken, how speech is framed” (p. 51).

Rowe and Malhotra (2013) further add that “silence is listening. That is what gives breath to a conversation” (p. 6), and they critique the lack of attention the concept of listening has received within pedagogy and communication theory (p. 5). However, with the field of Communication Studies continuously expanding, scholars in more recent years have started to push back against binaristic thought patterns and the privileging of Western thought as universal.

This project, then, adds to the more current trends and discussions within the field by complicating the binaristic view of voice and silence and looking at both concepts as dialogic. From a communicative perspective this is very important because binaries limit our conceptualization of voice as mere speech and silence as the absence of speech and sound without looking at the larger implications. Additionally, for communication pedagogy frameworks it is important to reconceptualize notions of voice and silence in order to create space and/or a classroom community that is safe for every student to exercise and perform their voice and silence. The following section responds to another big question that I have been asked about this project: How, then, can we conceptualize and understand voice and silence within the realm of this project?

### **Philosophical conceptualizations of voice and silence**

In this section, I briefly introduce some philosophical conceptualizations of and assumptions about voice and silence that are in line with the way I would like the concepts to be understood within the context of this study. In addition, I find this step imperative as it moves away from a binaristic view of voice and silence towards conceptualizing the two as being in constant dialogic tension with each other. Kalamaras (1994), in particular, pushes against the binaristic view of voice and silence that, he argues, the West has imposed on us. He argues that silence can “make meaning that is every bit as valuable as the meaning the practice of discourse

yields” (p. 4). He goes on to say that “as an authentic mode of knowing, silence is not opposed to language, which I define as the human capacity for vocal and written utterance. Rather, silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge” (p. 8). His arguments, for this research project in particular, are very significant as they find a link between voice, silence, and the creation of knowledge. Through centuries of colonization, Western culture has perpetuated the idea that silence equals absence of thought and knowledge as well as emptiness, thereby disregarding a plethora of cultures and cultural epistemologies that do not prescribe to binaristic views of the world. “Silence is not the opposite of speech; rather, they form a ‘continuum’” (Li, 2004, as cited in Burbules, 2004, p. xviii). Furthermore, going back to Rowe and Malhotra’s (2013) argument mentioned before, silence can also be conceptualized as a “space of possibility” (p. 2) that is fluid, ever-changing, and a safe space for reflection in its very nature. The dialogic tension between voice and silence, then, is also connected to the idea of agency and power. Silence does not equate to powerlessness; rather, silence can be a very powerful tool that can be used as a means for resistance. Strategic silence, as all silence really, is highly situational and contextual. As Li (2004) reminds us, there are a lot of varied meanings to silence, it is a very complex construct and as Kalamaras (1994) argues it is even paradoxically complex at times (p. 65).

Redirecting us back to the classroom setting, Li (2004) and Kalamaras (1994) both also emphasize the interdependency of voice, silence, and listening (Li, 2004, as cited in Burbules, 2004, p. xxiv). Listening as a concept in and of itself is just as complex as silence (Chapters 2 and 5, therefore, explore the notion of listening and active listening further). Finally, however, Kalamaras (1994) urges educators that allowing students to perform silence in the classroom is not just empowering them but also allows students “access to their own language and meaning-

making capabilities” (p. 29). We are, therefore, creating a space in which students can be their own agents and further connect with their contextualized epistemologies.

Consulting from the perspective of the awareness of silence, has little to do with remaining verbally silent with regard to one’s ideological commitments. Such an awareness does not suggest keeping ‘quiet’ in teaching and consulting but rather shifting awareness toward greater and greater reciprocity and a reseeing of the ‘other,’ so to speak, as the Self. (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 29)

Silence, therefore, can be a point of connection, it can create new meanings that disrupt views that position us in binary opposition with each other. Acknowledging the different meanings and the power and agency that are associated with silence, then, is also a way to speak back to the colonization of our educational system, our society, as well as our ways of understanding and producing knowledge. Silence in the classroom can be understood as the “presence of mindfulness” (Rowe & Malhotra, 2013, p. 9) in which students can engage more deeply not only with the course materials but also with their own identities and positionalities. Silence can allow us to take a breath, take a step back, and deeply connect with our thoughts and emotions. Silence can also allow us to listen, to listen for sounds, voices, narratives, and knowledges that we may have never heard before because they were drowned out by other noises and voices. It creates a space for possibility that we should embrace rather than try to disrupt. I hope that this project will contribute toward illuminating the value of creating such spaces.

## **Methods**

For the purpose of this dissertation research, I am using critical complete-member ethnography (CCME), as developed by Dr. Satoshi Toyosaki (2011), as the main method for critical inquiry. CCME argues for the value that derives from combining different ethnographic

methods in order to create an accurate account of cultural practices, as well as “focus on communicative practices and processes” (p. 66). I am, therefore, incorporating an autoethnographic account that functions to position myself as a researcher within this project. In addition, the purpose of the autoethnographic account is to extend the notion of membership as it is currently conceptualized within CCME. I elaborate more on CCME later in the dissertation.

I further employ the qualitative research methods of interviewing and fieldwork observation. In order to create a space for international students to share their narratives and have their voices heard, I conducted interviews with a number of voluntary participants. The interviews focused on how the participating international students conceptualize voice and silence and how they negotiate them within the U.S.-American classroom setting. For the fieldwork observations, I visited several classrooms that had international students enrolled during the Spring 2015 semester. I observed classroom behavior, paying particular attention to how international students in the class embodied and performed voice and silence. After the observation, each instructor of the observed courses was interviewed in order to get a better understanding of how instructors negotiate and address instances in which students perform and embody voice and silence in the classroom. Of specific interest here were concrete examples and pedagogical practices that teachers employed. Interviews and observation notes were transcribed and coded based on themes until I was able to detect patterns that could be used to answer my research questions. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a more detailed view of the methods employed during this research.

### **Chapter Layout**

At this point, I want to offer readers the opportunity to get an idea of how this research as a whole is structured by providing a brief account regarding the structure of each of the chapters.

Each of the chapters should not be regarded merely as a separate unit within this project, but as one element of a comprehensive account that contributes to the overall argument of this project. The goal of this dissertation is to bring into dialogue different theories that conceptualize voice and silence, expand current research practices, and create a space for international students to share their narratives and have their voices heard.

In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed account and review of current literature on voice and silence that falls within the meta discourses of postcolonial theory, critical (communication<sup>1</sup>) pedagogy, and international student-centered research. Furthermore, I bring into dialogue the reviewed literature in order to move away from binaristic, West-centric notions of voice and silence and towards a conceptualization of voice and silence as dialogic. Finally, I introduce readers to the concept of “active listening,” which can be considered a move towards a more inclusive view of silence within the classroom setting.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account and overview of CCME as a method for critical inquiry. Furthermore, I make the argument that CCME can and should be extended to intercultural inquiry rather than merely focusing on intracultural inquiry. Finally, I outline my methods for data collection by describing my primary and secondary research participants, my interviewing and classroom observation process, and by providing an overview of my data analysis.

Chapter 4 serves as an autoethnographic account and discussion that will allow readers as well as participants to gain a better understanding as to how I, as a researcher and international student, am positioned within this research. The beginning of this chapter provides readers an

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<sup>1</sup> The term “communication” in critical communication pedagogy is placed in parenthesis because some of the scholars included in this specific section do not operate from within the field of Communication Studies, but do identify as critical pedagogy scholars.



opportunity to understand how I have myself experienced voice and silence as an international student in the U.S.-American classroom setting. Chapter 4, on the other hand, focuses on my autoethnographic account in which I discuss the notion of membership and my continued struggle with my negotiation of membership within the international student community. This step is imperative not only because I want to remain as transparent as possible for my readers and participants and/or because this research focuses explicitly on international students, but also because the selected research method of CCME puts value on the inclusion of autoethnographic accounts into our research projects (Toyosaki, 2011).

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the collected data. Chapter 5, in particular, looks at how voice and silence are conceptualized by the participating international students and how they have experienced the two concepts within the U.S.-American classroom setting. In addition to narratives shared by participating students, Chapter 5 further functions to complicate West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and addresses/challenges the limitations of the current scholarly discourse regarding both concepts. Chapter 6, then, looks at pedagogical praxis and how instructors and students can create more inclusive classroom settings that acknowledge and invite different ways of knowing, knowledge production, and conceptualizations of voice and silence. Chapter 6 includes the analysis and discussion of data collected from international student interviews, classroom observations, and instructor interviews with regards to pedagogical praxis focusing on voice and silence. The notion of “active listening” (Hao, 2011; Li, 2001) as a means to reframe our understanding of classroom participation is one of the key concepts addressed and elaborated upon in this particular section.

Chapter 7 of this dissertation serves as a concluding section bringing together the main arguments and findings of this research as well as presenting the final implications of this project. Further, I address some limitations and future directions for this research project that may help to guide future projects and pedagogical praxis in West-centric higher education. Explaining how a move away from West-centric ways of knowing and knowledge production as well as the reframing of classroom participation can create more inclusive learning environments for a diverse group of students allows me to leave this project on a more hopeful note that moves us towards a more socially just and culturally inclusive approach to pedagogical praxis.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL ARTICULATIONS OF VOICE AND SILENCE

There's really no such thing as the *voiceless*. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard. – Arundhati Roy (2004)

International students, in much of the current scholarly discourse, are often depicted as one homogenous group with shared experiences and epistemologies. Such essentialism is not only inherently problematic, but can also be regarded as a colonizing act, which positions international students as the “Other.” After all, Said (2006) and Bhabha (1994) remind us that stereotypical depictions were used to oppress, marginalize, and essentialize the Other within colonial discourse. For the purpose of this project, I have, therefore, selected the three meta discourses of postcolonial theory, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research to help us deconstruct the notion of international students as the “Other,” as well as the misconceptions of silence within the classroom. In this section, I introduce postcolonial theory as the main anchor of this project. Then, I provide an overview of how the concepts of voice and silence have been articulated within each of the individual meta discourses selected for this project.

#### **Postcolonial Theory**

The numbers of international students seeking higher education in English-speaking, Western countries have been on a rise for the past few years. Much of the research looking at international student populations in English-speaking, Western countries, in particular the United States and Great Britain, uses Western epistemologies as the main framework to theorize issues connected to international student populations. Postcolonial theory, in particular, helps us move away from this West-centric approach to understanding and studying diverse populations. This is

especially important as Western epistemologies have been used for centuries to ostracize and colonize people who do not have White, male, Western, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied privilege.

Postcolonial theory emerged in response to European imperialism, which placed non-European countries and peoples in a subordinate position and privileged European knowledge and power above all others. As Grosfoguel (2008) argues, “the ascribed superiority of European knowledge in many areas of life was an important aspect of the coloniality of power in the modern/colonial world-system. Subaltern knowledges were excluded, omitted, silenced, and/or ignored” (p. 103). While postcolonial studies as a formal field of study and inquiry was not established until the 1980s with the introduction of Said’s work *Orientalism* (see Burney, 2012), “post-colonial theory has existed for a long time before that particular name was used to describe it” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006, p. 1). Postcolonial theory has often been employed to deconstruct power, domination, and hegemony between the colonized and the colonizer (Said, 2006), question our assumptions regarding knowledge and knowledge production, and has critically examined the concepts of oppression and marginality.

Postcolonial theory, then:

serves as a corrective to our penchant for casting these issues into a strictly U.S. context. It helps us see the worldwide oppression against the ‘other’ and the ability of dominant groups to define the terms of being and non-being, of civilized and uncivilized, of developed and undeveloped, of human and non-human.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 379)

Postcolonial theory, thus, is an especially suitable anchor for this essay because of its focus on such a diverse population, namely, international students in the U.S. Moreover, postcolonial

theory allows for the move of subaltern epistemologies from the periphery to the center, moves away from West-centric ways of knowing, and strongly argues for the inclusion of subaltern epistemologies into mainstream discourse. Furthermore, postcolonial theory creates a valuable framework for the deconstruction of systemic issues regarding voice and silence, and knowledge production, as well as for a better understanding of how the local and the global intersect and influence each other. Since this study looks specifically at the U.S.-American classroom setting – using postcolonial theory as the main anchor – the following sections focus on the concepts of knowledge and knowledge production, as well as the local-global dialectic, the question of voice, silence, and agency, and finally on postcolonial pedagogy.

**Knowledge production and the third space.** The discussion surrounding knowledge and knowledge production is very prominent within postcolonial studies. Questions regarding what constitutes knowledge, how subaltern epistemologies can push back against the hegemony of Western imperialist thought, and finally how local (subaltern) knowledges can be included into dominant discourse are at the forefront of the field. As Grosfoguel (2008) argues, “The point here is to put the colonial difference at the center of the process of knowledge production. Subaltern knowledges are those knowledges that emerge at the intersection of the traditional and the modern. They are hybrid, transcultural forms” (p. 103). In addition, it is important to point out that these knowledges do not just emerge at the “intersection of the traditional and the modern” (p. 103), but also at the intersections of the local and the global.

Within postcolonial studies, many scholars have articulated a connection between local and global types of knowledges that exist (see Mignolo, 2000; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013; Spivak, 2006). Local knowledges are often conceptualized as the types of knowledges that are excluded from dominant discourse, and are usually associated with the knowledges of oppressed

and/or colonized peoples. Global knowledges, on the other hand, form that canon of knowledge that is privileged throughout the world, namely a privileged, White, male, Western, Christian, able-bodied, heterosexual, upper/middle class discourse which has shaped pedagogies, educational systems, and knowledge productions globally. Mignolo (2000), in particular, stresses the importance of the interconnection of the local and the global in terms of knowledge production, arguing that:

Postcoloniality (and its equivalents) is both a critical discourse that brings to the foreground the colonial side of the “modern world system” and the coloniality of power imbedded in modernity itself, as well as a discourse that relocates the ratio between geohistorical locations (or local histories) and knowledge production. (p. 93)

He further adds that “today, local histories are coming to the forefront and, by the same token, revealing the local histories from which global designs emerge in their universal drive” (p. 21).

Bhabha (1994) refers to the concept of the intersectionality of the local and the global in regards to knowledge production as the third space - a space which makes the “structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process” and which additionally “challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People” (p. 54). Similarly, Sobré-Denton and Bardhan (2013) use the term “space of the in-between” (p. 34) and Mignolo (2000) prefers the term “border thinking:”

Border thinking is located at the intersection of local histories enacting global designs and local histories dealing with them. That is why border thinking can only be so from a subaltern perspective, since the enactment of global designs is

driven by the desire for homogeneity and the implicit need of hegemony. ...

Border thinking points toward a different kind of hegemony, a multiple one .... In other words, diversity as a universal project allows us to imagine alternatives to universalism. (Mignolo, 2000, p. 310)

In other words, local and global epistemologies do intersect and inform each other, creating something new, a third space (Bhabha, 1994), a space of the in-between (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013), or border thinking (Mignolo, 2000), which challenges our pre-existing understanding of knowledge production and moves it into a space “where something new is created when cultural differences intersect” (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013, p. 34).

Postcolonial theory, hence, moves us away from Eurocentric ways of knowing and towards more inclusive epistemologies, which create spaces where subaltern knowledges and realities are included and cherished. I would also like to unpack the notion of hegemony a bit further at this point and be transparent about its implications for voice and silence: hegemony, broadly speaking, within this context can be understood as the norm that is imposed on a group of people and is generally accepted by them. I find it imperative to also complicate the hegemonic nature of voice and silence, because while in many cultures voice might be considered hegemonic, it might be silence that is hegemonic in others. Therefore, while hegemony plays out a certain way in the U.S.-American classroom setting, it does not mean that there aren't different forms of hegemony also at play in educational settings outside of the West and/or U.S.

**Postcolonialism and the question of voice, silence, and agency.** Based on the literature that I have reviewed for this section, I have come to the conclusion that postcolonial theory is one of the first fields that pushed back against the notion that voice and silence are in binary opposition with each other. Scholars such as Hao (2010, 2011) have critiqued the Western

conceptualization of voice and silence as being mutually exclusive and framed in opposition by West-centric scholars. It should come as no surprise then that postcolonialism, with its commitment to deconstructing the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies, rejected the binaristic construction of voice and silence from the beginning.

Minh-ha (1996) invites us to conceptualize voice differently, moving away from understanding it as the absence of sound but rather as a different form of articulation with multiple meanings. Spivak (2006), however, argues that the subaltern – “a person without lines of social mobility” (p. 28) – can never really speak because she or he must adopt Eurocentric epistemologies in order to be heard. She argues that subaltern epistemologies are silenced due to Western hegemonic powers still in place today. It is, then, the responsibility of intellectuals – who know how to utilize Western epistemologies – to create a space for subaltern voices to be heard and included into dominant discourse. In her famous article, Spivak (2006) asks the question ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ As I, however, operate under the assumption that everyone does indeed have a voice, I wonder if the question we should be asking is ‘Who is listening?’ Other scholars, on the other hand, argue that the subaltern does have the agency to act and does have voice:

Today, silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included ...

Bringing themselves into the conversation is a transformative project that takes the form of border thinking or border epistemology – that is, the alternative to separatism is border thinking, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspective of people in subaltern positions.

(Mignolo, 2002, as cited in Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013, p. 22)



Therefore, not only does the subaltern today increasingly have voice but she/he also has the agency to push back against the hegemonic powers that keep his/her epistemologies in the periphery and demand to be included into dominant discourse. As Mignolo (2002) pointed out, marginalized groups are no longer waiting for privileged groups to create spaces where subaltern narratives and voices can be heard. Rather, marginalized groups are creating their own spaces within scholarship and social movements, for instance, to talk back to systemic oppression and to share their narratives.

In addition, many postcolonial scholars also see a strong connection between silence and agency, arguing that the two are actually not mutually exclusive but do indeed inform each other. As Chambers (1996) points out:

Silence can also be a marker of agency ... as a will not to say, or to unsay, and as a language of its own .... The refusal to respond can mark the refutation of a language in which one is being addressed. To reply to this mode is to adopt a voice that refuses to participate in the official record. This refusal of the 'vocal mandate' disrupts the positioning of power through the irruption of silence. (p. 51)

Therefore, Chambers (1996) invites us to regard silence as an active form of pushing back against various forms of colonial oppressions and hegemony; silence, hence, is a way to perform agency. Sobré-Denton and Bardhan (2013) help us understand the notion of agency within postcolonial scholarship by arguing:

Normally, when we speak of agency in relation to identity, we mean the power and ability of an individual to speak, be heard and define her own cultural identity and reality without fear of oppression. This is an 'either/or' individualistic view of

agency .... It seems like it would be more heuristic to think of agency in terms of degrees, that is, how much agency one has relative to others. ... Agency exercised by non-dominant groups can transform, resist, elaborate and resignify identities imposed upon them. Non-dominant groups can also interrupt the identities of dominant groups through creative exercises of agency. (p. 69)

Given that the purpose of this project is to challenge and deconstruct binaristic approaches to conceptualizing voice and silence, I believe that Sobré-Denton and Bardhan's (2013) argument to move away from a binaristic view of agency is very helpful. Agency, in other words, should be understood as a relational concept.

**Postcolonial theory and pedagogy.** While the discussion regarding knowledge and knowledge production within postcolonial studies is extensive, little research has been conducted under the label of postcolonial pedagogy. However, since pedagogy is an important concept within this project, I decided to designate a separate section to it. I believe that the inclusion of this section is beneficial for the discussion on voice and silence, as postcolonial theory calls for the epistemologies of marginalized groups in the English-speaking, Western classroom setting to be moved to the center.

In his article, Altbach (2006) argues that the educational systems in former colonies are still under the influence of neocolonizing forces, which privilege Western ways of knowing over local epistemologies. He defines neocolonialism as the omnipresence of Western countries' influence in the former colonies, as is visible, for instance, in the educational system and most of the school curriculum. Similarly to Spivak's (2006) and Bhabha's (1994) critiques of how the colonizers created groups of privileged people within the colonies to ensure that colonial power will remain intact, Altbach (2006) argues:

European languages have tended to remain influential among elite groups even after the schools have shifted to indigenous languages [and] elites have often sent their children to private schools conducted in a European language in an effort to maintain their privileged position. (p. 383)

In other words, until today, we can still see how colonial powers impact local epistemologies and how Western ways of knowing remain privileged within education globally.

However, Sobré-Denton and Bardhan (2013) offer a more hopeful view by arguing that postcolonial pedagogy, in its very essence, advocates for the inclusion of marginalized epistemologies as a means to deconstruct Euro-centric ways of knowing and can, hence, be understood as a form of resistance. Offering the concept of cosmopolitan pedagogy – a concept strongly influenced by postcolonial theory and intercultural communication – Sobré-Denton and Bardhan (2013) offer a pedagogy which “works to give alternative voices a central position and to translate voice and culture” (p. 165) and “focuses not just on the global, but also on the interconnectedness of the local with the global, and the use of the labor of the imagination to create links between the two” (p. 166). Cosmopolitan pedagogy, furthermore, calls for the decolonization of education and knowledge production, as well as a move of marginalized voices from the periphery to the center. This type of pedagogy, then, works to disrupt the very issues that Altbach (2006) critiqued, by allowing marginalized voices to move from the periphery to the center, as well as creating a link between global and local epistemologies. Diversi and Moreira (2009) also add that in “the decolonizing classroom – the territory for struggle moves from memory to the classroom in the making of new memories of resistance, transformation, notions of inclusiveness” (p. 208). Hence, their call for the decolonization of epistemologies is articulated in the “desire to push the postcolonial movement toward epistemologies ever more

inclusive of those who are actually getting caned for wanting dignity and social equality” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 20).

Finally, Burney (2012) introduces her concept of pedagogy of the Other. The main purpose of her approach is to center marginalized voices and identities in educational/academic discourse. She (2012) argues that her theory can help the Other come to terms with his or her “marginalization and how to reassert and reclaim one’s indigenous voice and re-present one’s identity and culture” (p. 197). Furthermore, the three main characteristics of the pedagogy of the Other provide a very valuable framework for my project in particular. The three “essential ingredients of the pedagogy of the Other” (p. 201), according to Burney (2012), are interculturalism, inclusiveness, and interdisciplinarity. Interculturalism “suggests the mixing and mingling of different cultures, where one borrows from the Other, learns from the Other, and connects with the Other to produce new configurations, forms, and cultural practices” (Burney, 2012, p. 202). Interculturalism, employed within pedagogical praxis, then, moves us away from a tokenizing use of the Other which only reinforces his or her Otherness. Inclusiveness focuses on the inclusion of the Other, his or her narratives, as well as identities into the classroom moving the Other away from marginalization and othering within the classroom. The “use [of] other narratives with examples from other cultures ... creates a sense of hybridity in the classroom ... which creates a positive environment of mutual respect and sense of belonging” (pp. 204-205). Finally, she notes that interdisciplinarity – the core of her approach to pedagogy – allows for greater accessibility of the concept. It expands the notion of inclusiveness across disciplines, and enriches the pedagogy itself by allowing for the inclusion of multiple perspectives and positionalities.

As previously mentioned, postcolonial theory is one of the main theoretical discourses shaping this particular project as it pushes back against the predominance of Western epistemologies not just in education but in our global societies as a whole. Furthermore, postcolonial theory is dedicated to disrupting binaristic thought patterns that privilege West-centric approaches to knowledge production. This meta-discourse, therefore, helps in the reframing of voice and silence as dialogic as it centers the various ways in which these two concepts are understood in different locales in our world. Using critical (communication) pedagogy as the second meta-discourse within this project, however, allows us to look further into how voice and silence are theorized and understood within educational settings in particular.

### **Voice and Silence within Critical (Communication) Pedagogy**

The theoretical discourse surrounding the concepts of voice and silence within critical pedagogy “derives from research examining the reasons for women’s silence in traditional classrooms” (Adams, 2007, p. 28). With the recent increase of diversity in higher education in the United States, communication scholars have broadened their research within critical pedagogy to include other marginalized groups into the discourse on voice and silence. However, the vast majority of critical pedagogy scholarship positions voice and silence in binary opposition, a limiting view that prevents us from gaining a better understanding of how voice and silence operate culturally. In this section, I outline the conceptualizations of voice, silence, and agency within critical (communication) research and its commitment to the decolonization of knowledge.

Cho (2013) notes that “one good way to understand what critical pedagogy is for is to figure out what it is against. It is apparent that critical pedagogy is in opposition to the mainstream education paradigm” (p. 15) which privileges certain types of knowledges (namely,

White, Western, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, middle class) over others. Critical pedagogy, hence, is committed to disrupting these privileged epistemologies by creating a classroom setting that “becomes the site for resistance and challenge to the system” (Cho, 2013, p. 41). Fasset and Warren (2007) state that critical communication pedagogy not only serves as a means for resistance against dominant discourses, but it also is strongly committed to the decolonization of knowledge and knowledge production through the inclusion of marginalized voices and epistemologies.

Critical pedagogy scholar Shor (1992) argues that the inclusion of marginalized epistemologies is imperative in order to decolonize education. However, he also warns that:

When official canons are challenged by new paradigms, movements, or curricula, there is often a bruising battle between contending forces, not a welcoming of the new material that challenges the interests represented by the old. ... Existing orthodoxies resist change because the standard curriculum represents more than knowledge; it represents the shape of power in school and society. (p. 34)

Since unfamiliar epistemologies disrupt dominant discourses, their inclusion in the classroom, unsurprisingly, may meet resistance from students, as well as instructors, who have been naturalized and educated into believing that “Europe is modernity, and, as such, the home of theory [and knowledge]” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 207). However, any pedagogy which is committed to social justice “requires a moral and ethical attitude toward equality and possibility and a belief in the capacity of people as agents who can act to transform their world” (Bell, 2007, p. 13).

Hence, as critical pedagogues, we are required to work against hegemony and oppressive systems of knowledge and knowledge production in order to create more socially just, more inclusive, critical, and decolonized classroom settings. Creating space for marginalized voices to

be included into the classroom is one way of doing this because “subjugated knowledges can challenge the hegemonic regime of the truth” (Cho, 2013, p. 81).

The concepts of voice and silence, throughout the reviewed literature on critical (communication) pedagogy, have been conceptualized in binary opposition to each other. Shor (1992), for instance, defines silence as the absence of dialogue within the framework of teacher-talk (p. 97). Wink (2011) argues that silence is something that should “be broken” (p. 82) and conceptualizes silence as “harmful” (p. 83) and being “powerless” (p. 88). Cho (2013) and Johnson (2006) see voice as “emancipatory” (Cho, 2013, p. 79) and directly linked to agency. Johnson (2006), for instance, argues that silence helps to “perpetuate privilege and oppression .... Our silence is crucial for ensuring its future, for the simple fact that no system of privilege can continue to exist without most people choosing to remain silent about it” (p. 88). Hence, silence has the power “to promote privilege and oppression” (Johnson, 2006, p. 105), rather than disrupting it. Even Freire (2003) goes so far as to say that “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (p. 88) and that “hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it” (p. 91).

Out of the reviewed literature, less than a handful of scholars mentioned that the overwhelming view of silence as something negative might be limiting, arguing that our understanding of voice should change constantly (hooks, 1994), that “silence may constitute a mode of opposition to the existing pedagogical practice” (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 197), and that “silence can have many different meanings” (Griffin & Ouellet, 2007, p. 102). While this limited view of voice and silence within the meta discourse of critical (communication) pedagogy is rather disappointing and problematic, I believe that it only underscores the importance of this study.

## **Voice and Silence in International Student-Centered Research**

For many international students, the classroom space is very important not only as a site of learning and engaging with different students, but also as a site for cross-cultural communication. Silence, voicelessness, and invisibility, however, may become very familiar concepts to those students who feel overwhelmed in this new learning environment. Hence, much of the reviewed literature looks at how voice and silence function within the Western, English-speaking classroom setting for international students, as well as aims to re-conceptualize the notion of “active participation.”

Verbal participation in many Western, English-speaking classrooms is considered a requirement for students and part of their final grade. “U.S. classroom culture ... continues to value speaking as a form of classroom engagement [while equating it] often strictly to oral communication” (Hao, 2010, p. 290). In other words, many of these classroom settings only consider “talking” as a form of active participation, a notion which Marlina (2009) argues should be “critically challenged ... as the only form of active participation” (p. 242). In addition, Hao (2011) emphasizes that because of international students’ unfamiliarity with U.S. cultural norms, West-centric education can isolate them further within the classroom setting and position them as the “Other” who does not partake and fit into this Western educational system.

However, many scholars who center international students in their research are pushing back against the binaristic view of voice and silence in the classroom setting, arguing that “silence can mean engagement in thought, not lack of ideas” (Marlina, 2009, p. 236). Rhetoric scholar Kennedy (1998) argues that “yang and yin [were] viewed as complementaries rather than as contraries. ... Speech is yang, silence is yin” (p. 157). Therefore, they cannot simply be separated from each other. Voice and silence have been regarded as relational rather than in



binary opposition – in particular, in some research positioned within postcolonial studies (see Chambers, 1996; Minh-ha, 1996) and international student-centered research. Hao (2011) argues, “Language and silence belong together: language has knowledge of silence as silence has knowledge of language” (p. 269). He specifically focuses on the idea of performance of silence in the classroom and its implications on different student bodies. Many instructors believe that “silences must be broken” (Housee, 2010) because it takes away a student’s agency within the classroom and “silences signify oppression and the voice is a means of empowerment” (Housee, 2010, p. 422). Hao (2011), however, invites us to question this “traditional” (negative) view on silence, moving us toward an understanding of silence as “an active performance of human subjectivity, agency, and voice in other cultures” (p. 276). He argues that there are, indeed, different types of performed silence – ranging from disinterest to rebellion – that we need to acknowledge and realize that for some students, performing silence is actually a productive space:

Silence should be understood as performance - that is, there are multiple performances of silence that should be taken into account in order to acknowledge different bodies and ideologies, which allows us not to reduce silence simply to a negative attribute in education. (p. 271)

Canagarajah (1999) and Marlina (2009) complement Hao’s (2011) argument by adding the dimension of cultural differences to their conceptualization of voice and silence.

Canagarajah (1999) focuses on the hegemonic power that is associated with English being the *lingua franca* globally in today’s society. The mere idea of English hegemony is strongly connected to the notion of voice and silence because it privileges English (U.S.-American/British) realities while silencing others. As Canagarajah (1999) argues, “Since

everything that is taught already comes with values and ideologies that have implications for students' social and ethical lives, teaching is always problematic" (p. 16). In positioning English as a global language, U.S.-American and British values are imposed on non-native speakers and often become the ideal to strive for – hence the argument of English hegemony. "The knowledge of the dominant groups is imposed through the institutions at their disposal, including the school. This knowledge in turn serves to justify the status quo" (p. 18). Marlina (2009) further adds that privileging Western and English-speaking epistemologies and ways of teaching and learning may be strongly connected to international students' performance of silence in the classroom.

Marlina (2009) stresses three important elements in his research: the re-conceptualization of active participation, the importance of community-building, and a critique of cultural analysis as a form of essentialism. He notes that "active participation ... seems to be perceived as the 'ideal' classroom behavior by some lecturers working in English-speaking western universities" (Marlina, 2009, p. 236). He further invites us to extend our understanding of active participation, which is often equated solely with oral communication (see Hao, 2011), arguing that based on his research, "the participants [international students<sup>2</sup>] also perceive listening, reading, and researching as other forms of active participation" (p. 240) and that "they do not just 'sit there', but they actually think, listen, process, and link with their prior knowledge before they seek an opportunity to express their carefully processed opinions" (p. 241).

Furthermore, Marlina (2009) argues that instructors have the responsibility to create spaces in which the voices of all students are incorporated within the classroom setting. As Pang, Rivera, and Mora (1999) note, "teachers must integrate cultural knowledge, ways of knowing,

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<sup>2</sup> The author uses the acronym NESB ISA (non-native English-speaking background international students from Asian countries) but I have chosen to use the term "international students" instead in order to emphasize the diversity of the group, be more inclusive towards diverse epistemologies, and finally to facilitate reading comprehension.

nonverbal communication styles, languages, analogies, and community into all aspects of schools” (p. 27) in order to ensure that every student, regardless of his or her background, feels included in the learning environment.

Finally, Marlina (2009) critiques the view of many researchers who argue that the passivity in the learning process of international students can be solely explained from a cultural point of view (p. 236). He argues that this analytic approach only reinforces the East versus West binary and creates a hierarchy which positions the international students’ cultures as inferior to Western cultures. Moreover, he underscores that much of the existing literature conceptualizes international students as a homogenous group, while disregarding their inherent diversity and complexity. While he does not discount that “culture, to a certain extent, plays a role in influencing [international students’] reluctance to participate in tutorials” (p. 237), he wants to extend our conceptualization of voice and silence and move away from other scholars’ assumptions (e.g., Bista, 2012; Harumi, 2011) that everything can be explained through cultural differences.

The meta discourse of international student-centered research focuses on the experiences and narratives of international students in particular. Since this dissertation centers the narratives of international students in regards to their experiences with and understanding of voice and silence, this meta-discourse offers an important theoretical foundation to build this project upon. Furthermore, the fact that many of the reviewed studies for this section do not particularly address the implications international students’ epistemologies may have for pedagogical praxis, I think that this project fills an important gap that exists between different theoretical and practical fields of inquiry. Before moving into bringing the previously reviewed meta discourses into dialogue with each other, I would like to add a section that directly addresses the idea of

classroom participation and how we conceptualize it. I think this is important as – within the classroom setting – voice and silence are often connected to the notion of participation.

### **Conceptualizing Classroom Participation**

As we gathered from the reviewed literature in this chapter as well as saw in the narrative I shared in my introduction, the concept of classroom participation often seems to be a cause for misunderstandings between the instructor and international students. Since this research focuses on how international students experience and negotiate voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting, I think it is warranted that we take a look at how the idea of ‘classroom participation’ is conceptualized within the U.S.-American educational system. Hence, the question is ‘What is classroom participation and what does it look like?’

In this section, I start off by providing an overview of the conceptualizations of classroom participation in the reviewed literature on instructor education and curriculum. I then discuss the ideas of classroom etiquette and expectations of students within the classroom as this seems to be strongly tied to the idea of participation and some of the strategies that educators have developed to encourage classroom participation. Since I want the focus to remain on the concepts of voice and silence, I follow this section by discussing the meanings of and reasons for voice and silence in the classroom setting (as provided by the literature), paying particular attention to international students and speaking back to the colonizing and hegemonic approaches much of the reviewed literature encourages instructors to employ. Finally, I address the notion of ‘safe space’ that much of the literature emphasizes as a means to encourage and increase student participation.

**Defining classroom participation.** Many scholars across varying fields of study and inquiry have conducted research on classroom participation. In my review of some of the

existing literature on classroom participation, I found it interesting that the majority of authors did not provide a concrete definition as to what they considered classroom participation to be and/or to entail. However, at the same time, most of them implied that classroom participation is considered the verbal contributions of students during a classroom period. In fact, some scholars argue that only “when students verbally participate [can] they maximize their engagement and their learning,” (Howard, 2015, p. 5) and that verbal participation only “validates a student’s existence in the class because what he or she does has meaning and has impact both on the class and on others” (Nakamura, 2009, p. 97). This shows that classroom participation in the form of verbal contributions by the students appears to not only be the most valued attribute, but at the same time seems to be the only way that students can position themselves as members in the U.S.-American classroom. While some scholars do acknowledge that instructors may expand the notion of classroom participation to also include attendance, tardiness, reading preparation, etc. (see Howard, 2015; McGlynn, 2001; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014), it becomes clear that “speech – talk – is the representation of thinking” (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008, p. 5). According to Fisher, Frey and Rothenberg (2008), the expectation of students to verbally contribute in the classroom is still a relatively new development. In fact, until the early 1900s, most of the information in the classroom was distributed by the instructor only and students were expected to remain silent and were sometimes even penalized when they spoke up in class. However, some instructors and scholars saw the value of classroom discussion, arguing that it was the only method to engage students in active learning. Active learning is defined as “paying attention to relevant information, organizing it into coherent mental representations, and integrating representations with other knowledge” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014, p. 38). However, it is imperative to acknowledge that while this change and emphasis on verbal

classroom participation by students is embraced in many classrooms in the U.S., many other countries and international educational institutions still adhere to the historical model of information dissemination – the teacher talks and the students listen. I expand on the notion of classroom etiquette and student expectations in the following subsection. While I agree with Howard (2015) that participating in classroom discussion may help in expanding a student’s critical thinking skills and may allow students to engage further with the course materials through dialogue with classmates, I strongly disagree with his claim that “to be engaged in active learning, students must do more than passively listen in class,” (p. 5) and that “when students are actively participating in discussion they learn more than when they merely listen” (p. 6). In this research study, classroom participation is conceptualized not just as verbal participation in the classroom. As Chapters 2 and 5 demonstrate, there are a variety of different ways that students can indeed participate in the classroom that don’t include speaking. Active listening, taking notes, attending class, preparing the readings, engaging with the class materials in writing, etc., are all considered classroom participation within the realm of this project. Chapter 6, in particular, speaks back to the here presented literature by critically engaging and expanding our understanding of voice and silence in the classroom, classroom participation, and pedagogical praxis.

**Classroom etiquette and student expectations.** International students, upon coming to the United States, not only face having to learn a new language and a new culture that might be radically different from their own, but they also have to get used to a new educational system. As previously mentioned, the change from a “passive” to a more “active” classroom setting that requires students to verbally and actively engage in the U.S. classroom is still rather recent. However, “in many non-[U.S.-]American cultures, college students are expected to sit quietly

and to talk only if directly asked to do so” (Rowe, 2007, p. 71). Therefore, for international students, it can be hard to go against classroom behavior that they have been “naturalized” into considering proper classroom etiquette. I remember that classroom discussion during my K-12 (or K-13 in the case of Germany at the time) was strongly encouraged. During my undergraduate education at a German university, however, I witnessed several of my classmates being put down in front of the class if they tried to ask for clarifications or tried to offer their interpretations of materials. Not only was this experience traumatic, but it also shaped my idea of what proper etiquette in higher education was supposed to look like. This discussion goes back to my previous assertion on the complicated nature of hegemony and the different ways it plays out. The idea of being naturalized into a certain type of behavior that is deemed acceptable is hegemonic in and of itself. In the instance of the German educational system (i.e., a Western culture), the acceptable behavior within the classroom space changes from K-12 to higher education settings. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, hegemony may function differently based on the cultural space it operates in. Therefore, several scholars suggest that instructors take the time to explain exactly what they mean by classroom participation, as well as explain what will be included in the grading of participation. In addition, Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) acknowledge that there are cultures outside of the U.S. that indeed do discourage students from verbally participating in the classroom and, therefore, suggest that instructors should also explain the value of active classroom participation. Furthermore, Kaplowitz (2012) argues that the following items are considered expectations and obligations of students in the U.S.-American classroom:

Learners taking personal responsibility for learning, the development of communities of learners, learners having some control over the learning process,

the use of collaborative learning environments, the opportunities for a variety of voices to be heard, and the fact that learners are given the chance to work on issues and problems that have personal, real-world meaning. (p. 6)

In addition to being active learners and participants in the classroom, students are also expected to aid in creating a safe and supportive classroom environment. I address the notion of a ‘safe space’ later in this section. Finally, Eyster and Martin (2010) argue that instructors must create a classroom environment in which students can expect to be called upon at any time. They argue that “we owe it to the class to establish an expectation of universal participation, and we owe it particularly to those who might seek to disappear that they are drawn into the light of conversation” (p. 308). Furthermore, they add that allowing students to remain silent in the classroom would be equal to allowing a student not to turn in a quiz or term paper. This attitude, in my opinion, can be detrimental, not just to international students, but to students in general as this can create a lot of anxiety. The argument of the authors is that forcing students to participate – even against their will – creates more engaged discussions and fosters more critical thinking and learning for the students. However, I want to strongly push back against this idea by asking: how can an environment that is anxiety-inducing for so many students at the same time foster learning? I would further argue that creating such an environment is not only harmful to students but is also a form of colonization as it forces non-conforming students into what U.S.-American culture considers to be appropriate classroom etiquette while disregarding the needs and values of those students. I expand on this discussion in the following section when presenting strategies that have been created to increase student participation in the classroom.

**Strategies for increased student participation.** As the previous sections have illustrated, verbal participation is preferred in the U.S.-American classroom. It comes as no



surprise then that a plethora of literature is in existence that provides different strategies and approaches for instructors to increase student participation in the classroom. I don't intend to present a comprehensive list of all of the different strategies I have come across during my review of the literature, rather, I discuss just a handful of strategies that I have come across repeatedly and in almost every piece of literature I reviewed.

As many of us who have been part of a primarily discussion-based U.S.-American classroom know, discussions tend to be very fast-paced, lively, and engaged. If you are not used to this type of classroom behavior this can be a very intimidating space – even more so, if the language spoken is not your native language. Eyster and Martin (2010) note that “the average interval in an American classroom between the end of a teacher’s question and the first student’s response is – drumroll – 0.9 seconds. Nine-tenths of a second” (p. 182). Many scholars, hence, argue that allowing students to take a couple minutes after the instructor has asked a question to write down and formulate their response may be a good strategy. Allowing some time for students to ponder the question may not only help in encouraging more students to participate but at the same time may increase the quality of the responses (see Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008; Howard, 2015; McGlynn, 2001; Nash, 2014; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). While this strategy still values voice over silence in the classroom and the desired outcome is for students to verbally participate, allowing students to produce their knowledge in writing – which they could also turn in at the end of the class period if they chose not to verbalize their thoughts (see Kaplowitz, 2012), might alleviate some anxiety and also emphasize that the written word is as important as the spoken word. A variation of this strategy, according to Svinicki and McKeachie (2014), would be to provide students with the discussion questions for the next class period at the

end of each class so they can prepare their responses and instructors don't lose time during the class. They argue:

Writing assignments before or as a follow-up to a classroom session can help especially those for whom English is not their first or preferred language. ...

Having students summarize what they took out of classroom discussion is not only effective active learning, but can provide you with feedback on the clarity of the discussion. (p. 156)

In doing so, instructors can also remain accountable to themselves by checking whether or not the materials covered in class are understood and students can follow the discussion.

After conducting several hours of classroom observations and interviewing a large number of students, McGlynn (2001) found that students really valued an instructor showing interest in his or her students and knowing a little bit about them (see pp. 64-68). Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) also added that getting to know one's students is beneficial because "one of the best ways of getting nonparticipants into the discussion is to ask them to contribute to a problem area in which they have special knowledge" (p. 49). According to them, this technique does not only show the student that the instructor has paid attention to them as a person, but at the same time students may feel more at ease if they can speak to something that they are an expert in. Again, however, this strategy also values voice over silence and at the same time may be considered a "breaking of the silence" as the student may not have volunteered the information willingly.

According to Howard (2015), classroom size may be an important factor impacting students' willingness to participate in the classroom as well. "Many quieter students who are reluctant to speak out in a class of 70, 40, or even 20 peers are willing to participate in a

discussion with 5 to 8 classmates” (Howard, 2015, p. 29). Helgesen and Brown (1995) and Brown and Smith (2007) in their work on active listening focus in particular on students who are learning English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL). While their focus is on listening strategies (which I elaborate on in Chapter 5), they also emphasize the value of small group discussion for EFL students as they can practice their English speaking skills with fewer peers which in turn allows more students to talk. While with this strategy again the desired outcome for students is to produce speech and silence is not encouraged, working in smaller groups may allow students to feel safer when voicing their opinions.

The final and, in my opinion, most controversial strategy to increase student participation is often referred to as “cold calling” (compare Eyster & Martin, 2010; Howard, 2015). Cold calling is considered calling upon a student who does not volunteer to participate in the classroom discussion. While research has proven that this strategy makes students uncomfortable (Howard, 2015) and may significantly increase their anxiety levels (Jung & McCroskey, 2004), there are still people who think that cold calling is a good strategy to encourage classroom participation. As Eyster and Martin (2010) argue, “keeping the process of calling on students unpredictable keeps every student on his or her toes. ... Anyone can be called on at any time, so stay focused and be prepared whether or not you’ve raised your hand” (p. 185). In addition, Howard (2015) argues that cold calling of students creates “a more democratic classroom by increasing the range of students participating,” (p. 20) and that “directly calling upon students increased the quality of participation” (p. 20). I, however, find this to be not only an unnecessarily cruel practice as this technique is proven to increase students’ anxiety levels, but I also think that in the context of this study it is a colonizing practice that imposes U.S.-American hegemonic values on international students who are more comfortable participating through

silence. In addition, I would like to question the claim that creating a classroom environment that is characterized by fear and anxiety in anticipation of being called upon at any minute fosters learning and increases the quality of learning. In the case of EFL students in particular, “when language anxiety becomes unmanageable, it impedes students’ learning process” (Liao & Wang, 2015, p. 631). I argue that cold calling, or breaking a student out of his or her silence, can be considered as violent an act as silencing a student because in this moment the teacher takes away the student’s agency, eliminating her/his choice to remain silent, and positions the teacher’s own needs and values above the students’. Therefore, I argue, that in the context of this study, cold calling is a cruel and colonizing practice within the classroom setting that causes more harm than good. Furthermore, it imposes a Western, binaristic lens on the relationship between voice and silence, viewing one as good/positive and the other as bad/negative. In the following section I address some of the possible reasons for and meanings of silence.

**Meanings of and reasons for silence in the classroom.** The reasons for and meanings of silence in the classroom setting are plenty and may be different for each person. The goal of this research is to allow international students at the examined university to define voice and silence for themselves and share their narratives of how they have experienced and negotiated the two concepts in the U.S.-American classroom setting. Therefore, Chapter 5 focuses particularly on this topic and includes an in-depth discussion and analysis of the different reasons for and meanings of silence in the classroom as articulated by my participants. This section, however, serves as a brief review of what some scholars within the fields of instructor education and curriculum have argued may be causing students to remain silent during classroom discussion.

Many instructors and scholars have asked the question why students are not participating. Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) argue that “boredom, lack of knowledge, general habits of

passivity, cultural norms,” (p. 48) and most importantly “fear of being embarrassed” (p. 48) are reasons why students choose to remain silent in the classroom. Chesebro and McCroskey (2002) add that some students may simply be too shy to speak up in class. They argue that “approximately 40 percent of college students consider themselves to be shy” (p. 25) and thus, refrain from speaking up in the classroom:

The instructor who recognizes that the student wants to remain silent should leave the student alone. Students are people, and people have the right to be quiet if they want to. While quietness has a price for the student, it is not the right of the instructor to force the student to communicate, and coercing the student to communicate against her or his will can only damage the relationship between that teacher and student. (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002, p. 25)

Other scholars, such as Howard (2015), acknowledge that speaking up in the classroom may cause students to experience high levels of anxiety. In their research on communication apprehension, Jung and McCroskey (2004) looked at EFL students and their experiences with anxiety related to speaking English in the U.S.-American classroom. They defined communication apprehension as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 171). Furthermore, they argued that international students’ communication apprehension increases significantly when being forced to speak in their non-native language. In addition, being exposed to a new, foreign culture and a classroom setting that has different conceptualization of adequate classroom etiquette also aids in increasing levels of anxiety. Howard (2015) adds to their argument by stating that an EFL student’s mastery of the English language is directly connected to their

classroom participation, and that non-native English speakers are less likely to participate in class discussions.

The list of reasons for why students may choose to remain silent in the classroom are overwhelmingly negative – boredom, lack of interest, lack of knowledge, shyness, anxiety, passivity. This, however, is only the case if one looks at silence in the classroom from a U.S.-American and/or Western point of view while disregarding that there is a plethora of cultures where silence is actually valued over speaking. Silence can have many different meanings! Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) mention that silence can be a sign of respect for someone who is older or has more knowledge than oneself (p. 152), and that silence does not simply mean that a student is not engaged, or is bored, and/or disinterested in the class. They argue that silence could be a self-preservation tool for some “students coming from experiences of racism [and/or] of being put down” (p. 153). Unfortunately, most of the literature doesn’t dig any deeper than simply stating that silent students may have different cultural norms and may just be trying to show respect to their instructor. Their solution to this “problem?” Creating a “safe classroom space.” Due to the very limited conceptualizations of silence beyond a West-centric point of view, I think that the significance of this project is warranted as it includes different views on voice and silence, centers the narratives of international students, and moves away from a binaristic view of voice and silence. Finally, since the notion of the classroom as a ‘safe space’ has been mentioned several times at this point, the following section critically examines this notion in particular.

**The classroom space as a ‘safe space’ – is it merely an illusion?** In much of the reviewed literature it is argued that creating a ‘safe space’ in the classroom could help students overcome anxiety and fear to participate in discussion. Scholars define ‘safe space’ as “building

learning communities or a supportive classroom community” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014, p. 198), “creating a safe, welcoming, and supportive learning climate in which we are all working together for the common goal of improving everyone’s knowledge, skills, and abilities,” (Kaplowitz, 2012, p. 44) and a space in which “students know that they are among friends” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014, p. 48). Relying on the building blocks of collaboration, cooperation, and respect the idea of a safe space in which learning is a communal goal seems to create the “ideal” learning space. According to Chesebro and McCroskey (2002), instructors only need to follow four steps in order to achieve a safe classroom space: “1) avoid testing through talk, 2) avoid grading on participation, 3) avoid alphabetical seating, and 4) avoid randomly calling on students to respond. ... Each can contribute to making the classroom a more comfortable place for learning by reducing communication demands” (pp. 30-31). However, as we know, this “one-size-fits-all” approach to pedagogy simply doesn’t work. While this approach sounds good in theory, we know that our students, we as instructors, and we as people are a lot more complex. Many scholars have argued that creating a safe classroom space is necessary in order to increase student participation, but also to engage in tough conversations that foster critical thinking in students. In response to this, Burbules (2004) argues that:

classrooms are not safe spaces for dialogue across differences [...because] we place marginalized students at greater risk: open dialogue ... requires additional effort by these students to articulate their concerns (in a way that can be heard), to translate their ideas and experiences into a common language (which is often not their own language), to expose themselves (in a manner that puts them at risk for judgment and rejection. (pp. xvii-xviii)

I agree that creating a positive and empathetic learning environment is beneficial in terms of making students more comfortable in a space that they may not consider to be comforting. However, at the same time, I also feel that the idea of a safe classroom space is utopian and problematic because we rarely ask ourselves who this space we are creating is really safe for? As Burbules (2004) mentioned, oftentimes this space is created for marginalized people to break out of their silence in order to educate White, male, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, cisgendered, Western, middle class, English-speaking classmates. Therefore, not only do these spaces require marginalized students to break out of their silence “for the greater good,” but at the same time it negates their choice of whether or not they decide to remain silent.

While I was hoping to end this brief theoretical discussion on a more hopeful note, I do think that it does show the current state of the U.S.-American educational system. As we have seen from this review, this educational system is one that values voice over silence while disregarding the complexities and meanings of both of these concepts. It is a system which, in its current state, promotes hegemonic, colonizing, and West-centric values, epistemologies, and ways of knowledge production. Therefore, and more than ever, I hope that this research will speak back to these notions by centering the narratives of international students, expanding our conceptualizations of voice and silence in the classroom setting, and moving towards a more inclusive pedagogical praxis. By bringing the meta discourses that shape this research into dialogue with each other, I am hoping to take a step towards this goal.

### **Dialogic Approach to Postcolonial Studies, Critical (Communication) Pedagogy, and International Student-Centered Research**

While I am not claiming that postcolonial studies, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research have never been conceptualized together in previous



research, I believe that an emphasis on a dialogic approach where all three meta discourses inform each other is not common and can be very beneficial for further research. After taking a closer look at the three meta discourses, all three appear to have certain things in common, and complement each other wherever one of the discourses may fall short. In this section, I pay particular attention to the different ways in which the discourses complement each other to underscore my argument that a dialogic approach to future research incorporating postcolonial studies, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research may help in moving towards a more complex, grounded, and applied approach to understanding how voice and silence can be conceptualized for highly diverse groups (in this project's case – international students).

After careful analysis of the three selected meta discourses that frame and inform this project, I have come up with four themes to bring all three discourses into dialogue with each other: (1) understanding the multiple dimensions of voice, silence, and agency, (2) re-conceptualizing classroom participation, (3) inclusion of multiple lived experiences, and (4) community-building. These themes further help me in my re-conceptualization of voice and silence within the U.S. classroom setting. In the following section, I address each of these themes individually and position them within the meta discourses of postcolonial studies, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research. I would like to stress, however, that these different themes are not to be understood as separate from each other; rather, we need to conceptualize them as interconnected and informing each other within and beyond the classroom setting.

**Understanding the Multiple Dimensions of Voice, Silence, and Agency.** As mentioned previously, the meta discourse of critical (communication) pedagogy falls tremendously short in

conceptualizing voice and silence as anything other than a binary opposition. I, therefore, agree with Hao's (2011) critique that while critical (communication) pedagogy contributes a lot to the discussion on dialogue and agency (p. 274), "critical pedagogues should not simply define silence in its absolute terms such as the opposite of speech" (p. 277). The meta discourses of postcolonial studies, as well as international student-centered research, therefore, can enhance the conceptualization of voice and silence as interconnected within the discourse of critical (communication) pedagogy. Postcolonial scholar Minh-ha (1996), for instance, argues that silence is more than just the absence of voice, sound, or dialogue but it also is a space in which we are invited to critically examine the ways in which we are socialized to understand and know certain things.

In addition, international student-centered research reminds us that "the West has misinterpreted the meaning of silence" and that "Western conceptions of silence, [are constructed] as negative" (Kalamaras, 1994, as cited in Bista, 2012, p. 77). Furthermore, this meta discourse underscores the "significance of silence as a listening strategy" as well as the notion that "talk and silence mutually influence [and inform] each other" (Harumi, 2011, p. 261). Hao (2011), in particular, draws direct connections between silence and agency arguing that "one way to reframe critical pedagogy is to consider silence as an active performance of human subjectivity, agency, and voice in other cultures," (p. 276) and that "silence can mean many things that can be performed as a form of agency; critical pedagogues should not simply define silence in its absolute terms such as the opposite of speech" (p. 277). Hence, silence does not necessarily perpetuate oppression and hegemony as much of Western scholarship may have claimed, but rather, is a different form of agency that may not fit into the stereotypical, West-centered conceptualization of voice, silence, and agency.

**Re-Conceptualizing Classroom Participation.** While the theme of re-conceptualizing classroom participation is mostly focused within the meta discourse of international student-centered research, I do believe that a separate section for this particular theme is appropriate due to the fact that international students are the focus of this particular study. Furthermore, I believe that this theme can enhance both postcolonial studies/pedagogy and critical (communication) pedagogy as it allows us to critically deconstruct the West-centric notion of classroom participation in the U.S. Marlina (2009) points out that “talking is not necessarily the only form of participation and silence does not necessarily mean being mentally disengaged. As the students interviewed for this study confirm listening, reading, and researching are also valid and effective forms of participation” (p. 243). The narrative included at the beginning of this dissertation also underscores the notion that active listening and note-taking should be considered as classroom participation. Li’s (2001) concept of “active listening” speaks to this issue: “In the classroom settings, as teachers enlist ‘participation’ as an evaluation criterion, they inevitably suggest that silent active listening is not a legitimate form of ‘participation’” (p. 162). Furthermore, Hao (2011) concurs with Li, stating that “the perpetuation of speech in the classroom is the norm in which teachers devalue silence by requiring students to participate orally without recognizing ‘silent active listening’ as a legitimate form of participation” (p. 275).

Thus, I strongly believe that the theme of re-conceptualizing classroom participation can enhance critical (communication) pedagogy because it allows for the different realities of international students to be included and validated. Furthermore, I argue that extending our conceptualization of “active participation” can be regarded as a form of decolonizing the Western, English-speaking classroom as it challenges dominant forms of knowing and learning.

**Inclusion of Multiple Lived Experiences.** The value and significance of the inclusion of multiple lived experiences into the classroom setting is one that can be traced throughout all three meta discourses used to frame this project. However, the discourse of international student-centered research rarely elaborates on how international students' epistemologies, in particular, can enhance the classroom setting. Therefore, I believe that postcolonial studies and critical (communication) pedagogy can enrich this discourse by emphasizing the significance of subjugated knowledges to decolonize the West-centric classroom.

As Mignolo (2000) argues, “colonial modernities [have] built a frame and a conception of knowledge based on the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics and, by doing so, has subalternized other kinds of knowledge” (p. 13). Therefore, colonization has privileged certain types of knowledges (i.e., White, male, Western, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class) while moving others to the periphery. Mignolo (2000) offers his concept of border thinking as a means to include subjugated epistemologies into dominant discourse, a necessary step in order to create a more critically-informed, and decolonized approach to knowledge and knowledge production. Diversi and Moreira (2009) also strongly advocate for the significance of multiple voices to be included into the “New Classroom<sup>3</sup>.” They argue that “acknowledging our privileges and the suffering in the world makes for good starting conversation in the decolonizing New Classroom” (p. 211).

Operating from within the meta discourse of critical pedagogy, hooks (2003) also underscores the “necessity of teaching students in this nation perspectives that include a recognition of different ways of knowing” (p. 46). By including multiple ways of knowing,

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<sup>3</sup> The “New Classroom” for Diversi and Moreira (2009) is the decolonized classroom in which between and oppressed realities and narratives are included. It also is a space of transformation that embraces decolonizing praxis and performance. (see pp. 208-218)

“students come to understand themselves as subjects of history and to recognize that conditions of injustice can also be transformed by human beings” (Cho, 2013, p. 79). This argument strongly connects to “the core element of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [which] is about conscientization: the transformation of consciousness from an acceptance of oppression/reality to a belief that reality can be changed” (Cho, 2013, p. 80). Students are, therefore, reminded that we all have the ability to change reality toward a more hopeful, inclusive, socially just, and critical future. Given these very important implications not only for voice and silence, but also for agency in the classroom setting and how they may apply to international students, this theme – informed by postcolonial studies and critical (communication) pedagogy – offers tremendous insights to and enhancements for international student-centered research.

**Community-Building.** While this final theme can be traced throughout the three different meta discourses, I do believe that community-building is very important in itself, especially when dealing with a diverse group such as international students who have to function within a different cultural setting far away from home. Within the discourse of postcolonial studies, Sobré-Denton and Bardhan’s (2013) conceptualizations of cosmopolitan pedagogy offer insight into community-building outside of and within the classroom. They write:

cosmopolitan pedagogy engages knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon, in which ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ become fused positions in and of themselves, allowing for all to share in the learning experience and focus on values such as translation, shared memory, forgiveness, and imagination. (pp. 152-153)

Furthermore, I believe that community-building, as we can understand it within the context of the decolonized classroom, is connected to the idea of actively listening to one-another and paying respect to our individual epistemologies. As hooks (1994) argues:

Just the physical experience of hearing, of listening intently, to each particular voice strengthens our capacity to learn together. ... Hearing each other's voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other. (p. 186)

This is the type of community-building within the classroom that Marlina (2009) advocates for when he addresses the significance of critical self-reflection, not only for the teachers/instructors, but also for the other students who are part of creating the classroom community. Minor steps such as actively listening to fellow classmates, being aware of the different bodies within the classroom, and showing respect for the different realities and epistemologies of instructors and students are all ways in which we can build a strong classroom community. In this community, international students and other marginalized groups, then, can feel accepted and embody the multiple forms of voice, silence, and agency.

### **Research Questions**

The goal of this literature review was to bring into dialogue the three meta discourses of postcolonial studies, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research. By providing an outline of the key commitments of all three discourses, I have made a case for why I believe these particular discourses complement each other well and can enhance each other's limitations when conceptualizing voice, silence, and agency within the U.S.-American classroom setting. I focused on the four themes of (1) understanding multiple conceptualizations of voice, silence, and agency, (2) re-conceptualizing classroom participation,

(3) inclusion of multiple lived experiences, and (4) community-building in order to argue for a dialogic approach between the three selected meta discourses. While I am not arguing that these are the only themes connecting all three meta discourses, I believe that these four selected themes well serve the understanding of voice, silence, and agency and the ways in which they are experienced by international students in the U.S.-American classroom setting. Since international students are the focus of the study, I believe that this dialogic approach to postcolonial studies, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research creates a valuable foundation for how we can re-conceptualize and enhance our understanding of voice, silence, and agency for this particular group of students and their specific intercultural context.

Finally, I have made a case for the disruption of voice and silence as binary opposites and for the conceptualization of the two as being interconnected. In addition, I believe that in our attempt to decolonize homogeneous, oppressive, West-centric classroom settings and practices we have to be inclusive of the different conceptualizations of voice, silence, and agency. Furthermore, in order to move away from classroom settings that reinforce colonizing practices we must create a supportive learning environment that is inclusive of and cherishes different realities, acknowledges different bodies, moves marginalized voices from the periphery to the center, and embraces the multiple embodiments of silence, voice, and agency. In doing so, I believe we can avoid incidents like the one that inspired this very project and that position international students as the “Other” and move toward an inclusive, socially just, critical pedagogy.

Based on the four themes discussed in this chapter, I developed the following research questions that guide this project:

RQ1: How do international students in the U.S. conceptualize voice and silence?

Given the discussion of the three meta discourses selected to theoretically ground this research, I think this first research question speaks to the different ways in which people from various cultural backgrounds may think about voice and silence. As previously mentioned, many people operating from a West-centric point of view may regard voice and silence as binaristic. However, given that international students are such a diverse group of people who come from a plethora of different cultures and backgrounds, their conceptualizations may move away from the binaristic conceptualization of voice and silence and towards a more dialogic and/or symbiotic relationship between the two. This research question, therefore, provides a point from which I can analyze and discuss how voice and silence are understood by a diverse group of people.

The second research question I am posing focuses on the U.S.-American classroom setting in particular:

RQ2: How do international students negotiate voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting?

After gaining a better understanding of how international students conceptualize voice and silence in general, Question 2 addresses how voice and silence are negotiated within the U.S.-American classroom setting. Based on the reviewed research and my own personal experiences as an international student in the U.S., the U.S.-American educational system tends to privilege voice over silence. That is to say that active, verbal classroom participation is required of most of the students whereas silent listening and observation are not considered as participation. This question serves as a first step for critically examining pedagogical praxis that operates within a West-centric epistemological system. Furthermore, I address ways in which



international students have had to negotiate the U.S.-American approach to pedagogy, in particular with regards to voice and silence.

As I have mentioned in previous sections of this dissertation, one of the main goals of this study is to critically examine West-centric, U.S.-American pedagogical praxis. Within this realm, I do consider it imperative to also include the narratives and experiences of the instructors who have to function within this academic setting. My third research questions, therefore, creates a space for instructors to share their views on voice and silence in the classroom:

RQ3: How do instructors approach voice and silence in their pedagogical practices within U.S.-American academic settings?

Instructors are one of the core elements in forming learning communities within classrooms world-wide and many have very different approaches to pedagogical praxis. With our world becoming increasingly interconnected classrooms are becoming more diverse spaces as well. Students and teachers from a variety of cultural, social, and economic backgrounds come together in this diverse space that we call a classroom with the goal to exchange knowledge and learn from each other. In addition, this space is not just a space where different cultures come together but it is also a space in which different learning and teaching styles meet and merge. With this in mind, classrooms can be the most diverse and intercultural spaces some of us may ever have to negotiate. As an instructor, it is very hard to account for all of the intersecting identities, needs, and goals that the classroom community calls for. Voice, silence, and the ways in which we understand the notion of participation are just a few of the matters that instructors need to be aware of and account for in their pedagogical praxis. Research Question 3, therefore, creates a space for instructors to share and reflect upon their own pedagogical approaches to

voice and silence in the classroom in general, and as it pertains to international students in particular.

My final research question aims to bring into dialogue the narratives and experiences of the participating international students and instructors in order to critically examine and deconstruct West-centric epistemologies that shape the U.S.-American educational system by using the concepts of voice and silence as an entry point into the discussion:

RQ4: How can we reconceptualize West-centric notions of voice and silence in academia and in pedagogical settings?

While this part of my dissertation research does not aim to merely critique the U.S.-American educational system, the goal is to come up with different approaches in which we can create more inclusive learning spaces for our diverse student and teacher populations.

Furthermore, the focus lies on how we may reconceptualize voice, silence, and classroom participation in order to take into account different epistemologies and ways of knowing and being. In the following chapter I introduce the methods that I used to help me address my research questions.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

Due to the nature of this project, I decided to utilize critical qualitative methods in order to conduct this research. More specifically, I used Toyosaki's (2011) critical complete-member ethnography (CCME) as a means to approach and analyze my data. In this chapter I outline the method of CCME as a method for critical inquiry within communication research. In addition, I make the argument for the extension of CCME to intercultural communication. This argument is significant within the realm of this research as the participants for this research are members of a highly diverse and heterogeneous group, which means that the dialogue during the interviewing process is a form of intercultural dialogue and communication, rather than intracultural communication, and membership categories are more blurred and fluid. Finally, I present my method and process of data collection by providing a detailed account of participant solicitation, participant pools, interviewing, classroom observation, and data analysis.

#### **Conceptualizing Critical Complete-Member Ethnography (CCME)**

Critical Complete-Member Ethnography (CCME) is a type of ethnographic inquiry which incorporates and is informed by ethnography of communication (EOC), critical ethnography, and autoethnography. By conceptualizing CCME in-depth in this section and by making a case for its applicability to intercultural communication research, I am setting a goal for this project to fulfill the commitments of all three methods that inform CCME. However, as is the case with any type of research, the process of the data collection and the data itself will determine whether or not I will be able to fully accomplish all of the commitments of my selected method of inquiry. My final chapter elaborates on the extent to which I was able to fulfill this methodology.

CCME is defined as “an innovative intracultural praxis which engages in and facilitates social justice and cultural reform through its dialectical and highly personalized communication theorization” (Toyosaki, 2011, p. 62). Drawing from the three aforementioned methodologies that inform CCME, the following concepts can be identified as the key commitments of CCME: (1) epistemological intimacy, (2) critical self-reflection, and (3) the construction of social and cultural critique<sup>4</sup>.

Epistemological intimacy stems from the positioning of EOC as a theoretical anchor of CCME and is essential in the critical and self-reflexive examination of the research phenomenon, as well as the research community (Toyosaki, 2011). Chuang (2014) poses that “to combine the concepts of ‘epistemology’ and ‘intimacy’ together, auto-representational writings from ethnographers’ intimate disclosures communicate epistemological values that knowledge can be conceived experientially, partially, and (inter)subjectively between the self and others” (p. 5). Epistemological intimacy, hence, speaks to the relationships that are fostered within the research community, between researcher and participants, which is further supported by the shared intracultural epistemologies and the critical reflections and negotiations of the group.

The second key commitment of CCME speaks to the significance of critical self-reflection by the researcher. This commitment is derived from the inclusion of autoethnographic values into CCME: “CCME, by design, situates self-reflexivity in order to critically observe and examine the researchers’ own participation in the community under study” (Toyosaki, 2011, p. 65). I believe that critical self-reflection on how one’s positionality as a researcher influences

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<sup>4</sup> Membership has not been incorporated in this list of key commitments because a separate section in Chapter 4 is dedicated to the conceptualization of membership within CCME due to the nature and focus of this project.

and functions within the group is imperative in order to remain accountable to power differences and one's own privilege. While intracultural communication is the focus in CCME research and the researcher is already positioned as a community member, I do believe that it is vital to interrogate power differences within the group as well as one's own positionality in order to adhere to the 'insider-looking-in-and-out' paradigm the method of CCME subscribes to. In addition, I feel it imperative to mention that one should not equate "complete" with sameness. As my upcoming discussion in Chapter 4 on how we can complicate our perception of complete membership within CCME for intercultural communication research shows, our multiple, intersecting identities are always shifting, fluid, and multiple.

The third key commitment of CCME that I mentioned is the construction of social and cultural critique. In being accountable to macro as well as micro struggles, CCME can be positioned as a critical ethnographic method of inquiry and may function as a praxis of social justice. As Toyosaki (2011) argues, "in CCME, the community members become empowered by coming to understand their own culture from the inside and connecting it with its neighboring communities" (p. 65). In other words, this commitment is another adherence to the 'insider-looking-in-and-out' paradigm the method subscribes to. Moreover, this characteristic also fosters critical self-reflexivity on the part of the participating community, as it requires critical reflection on how one – as part of a group or individual – might be implicated in systemic issues of power, privilege, and oppression.

CCME, hence, is a critically oriented methodology of ethnographic inquiry, which connects the individual to the systemic, calls for critical self-reflection, and allows for in-depth analysis of intracultural communication issues by employing a variety of qualitative research methods (e.g., participant observation, interviews). Furthermore, CCME underscores the

importance of the connection between the researcher and the participants – which is articulated through its commitment to epistemological intimacy and the value of ‘insider research.’ In addition, CCME also “moves beyond the ‘othering<sup>5</sup>’ of my research subjects by placing myself as part of the group under study and viewing my own experiences as ‘data.’ I seek not only to understand them, but also me and, most important, us” (Ellis, 2004, p. 230). While CCME provides important insights to the notion of membership within (critical<sup>6</sup>) qualitative research methodologies, I believe further discussion and complication of this notion is especially required if we take into account the plethora of research arguing for the conceptualization of identity as intersecting, fluid, and sometimes contradictory (Anzaldúa, 2012; Bardhan 2012; Bhabha 1996; Diversi & Moreira 2009; Sarup 1996).

### **Membership within CCME**

The ethnographic method of CCME is strongly informed by complete-member ethnography (CME) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) which, in particular, focuses on the implications of membership in ethnographic research, as well as the positionality of the researcher in his/her varying membership stages. Adler and Adler (1987) were among the first scholars who conceptualized different membership roles of the ethnographic researcher: (1) peripheral member researchers, (2) active member researchers, and (3) complete member researchers. Many scholars who have looked at the different membership roles and have focused on the complete member researcher, specifically, agree that complete membership is understood as the type of research in

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<sup>5</sup> Othering refers to the process of constructing another people or group as radically different to oneself or one’s own group, usually on the basis of racist and/or ethnocentric discourses. (Weedon, 2004, p. 166)

<sup>6</sup> The term critical was placed in parenthesis because not all qualitative methods operate within the critical paradigm and CME – a foundation of CCME – also does not stress the critical aspect of the research. Yet, I pose that CCME has important implications for critical and non-critical research.

which the researcher is already a full member of the group he/she is studying (Adler & Adler, 1987; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, this type of research is also often referred to as ‘insider research’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014; Kanuha, 2000; Mullings, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitinger, 2013). However, much of the reviewed literature focusing on insider research positions insider and outsider in binary opposition, posing that one must either be one or the other (Greene, 2014).

Complete-member ethnography (CME) extends the notion of insider research by “taking an ‘insider-looking-in-and-out’ approach, focusing on communication patterns endemic to a particular country or co-culture within a society” (Shuter, 2008, as cited in Toyosaki, 2011, p. 63). CCME research, then, extends insider research by also taking into account the researcher and arguing for the inclusion of critical self-reflection by the researcher. This is an important addition to more “traditional” insider research because the researchers “rarely address their position in their research” (Greene, 2014, p. 1).

However, CCME still takes a similar approach to the conceptualization of membership as previous scholars have taken, arguing that CCMEers and their participants are part of the same group, “share socialization and a cultural system of codes, symbols, and meanings” (Toyosaki, 2011, p. 64). Therefore, CCME is, indeed, an accurate method that can be employed when looking at *intracultural* communication patterns and issues. However, I believe that the notion of membership needs to, and should be, complicated further, as membership lines are often not as ‘clear-cut’ as one may assume. As previously mentioned, much of the research methodologies looking at membership still conceptualize insider and outsider as dichotomous with only few exceptions moving towards a more complicated approach to membership categories (Chavez, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Subedi, 2006). While I am not arguing that CCME actively

promotes the conceptualization of insider and outsider as exclusively dichotomous, I do find it imperative that the notion of membership be complicated further within CCME, as in its current state it does position complete membership as a rather fixed category. I believe that in complicating the notion of membership, CCME can be re-conceptualized as a critical ethnographic method that can be applied to *intercultural*, rather than only *intracultural* research. This can help us move away from the dichotomous conceptualization of membership. I am, therefore, proposing to complicate the notion of membership within CCME by applying the conceptual frameworks of betweenness, hybridity, insider/outsider, and Self/Other to the current discussion of membership.

### **The Possibility of CCME for Intercultural Communication**

Broadly defined, intercultural communication can be understood as “any interaction between two or more members of different cultural groups (international, interfaith, interethnic, interracial)” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014, para. 1) that encourages us “to conceptualize culture as fluid and dynamic” (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013, p. x) and that “foregrounds issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts” (Halualani & Nakayama, 2013, p. 1). As a White, Western, female, heterosexual, working class, cisgendered, able-bodied, agnostic, international student in the United States, who looked at international student communities for her dissertation and who chose to employ CCME as her selected method of inquiry, I hope to underscore the possibility of CCME for intercultural communication research. I believe that an important entry point to this discussion is the question of how we negotiate our betweener researcher positionalities with our research participants.

One of the key commitments of CCME, as previously outlined, is epistemological intimacy, which refers to the idea of building relationships between researcher and participants.



The concept of epistemological intimacy, I believe, can help us negotiate the complicated space of the ‘in-between’ (Collins, 2013; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Grossberg, 1996), the ‘inter’ (Bardhan, 2012; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013), and the ‘hyphen’ (Anzaldúa, 2012; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I believe that building relationships with people, in general, always requires the negotiation and articulation of our multiple, intersecting identities (Warren & Fassett, 2015). In addition, any type of ethnographic research often requires that we negotiate entry into the research site or to the groups we wish to study, whether we are members or not (Lindlof & Taylor, 2012). For betweenner researchers, or ‘halfies’ (Subedi, 2006), this negotiation process is especially significant as it also requires critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding his/her own privileges (Subedi, 2006). However, in the process of negotiating his/her identity with the participants not only do participants, arguably, engage in intercultural dialogue, but they may also engage in relationship-building (which is an important aspect of CCME) and may recognize that membership does function on a continuum. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that:

The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (p. 61)

In other words, one could make the argument that by engaging in research, such as CCME, that emphasizes the significance of epistemological intimacy and relationship-building, we have to take into account the more fluid nature of insider/outsider and betweenness because only this conceptualization of membership allows for the connection between researcher and participant to happen.

As Diversi and Moreira (2009) argue, we are all betweeners, and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) posed that “as researchers we can only ever occupy the space between” (p. 61). If we prescribe to the idea of hybrid and/or betweener identities – and I did choose ‘if’ to be mindful that some people may not conceptualize identities as multiple and fluid – then, I believe the notion of fixed membership is moot as we all are positioned as betweeners who are moving back and forth on a continuum between insider and outsider, Self and Other, member and non-member. Hence, in extending our conceptualization of epistemological intimacy within CCME to be inclusive and mindful of our fluid, shifting identities we can make the case for CCME as a research method for intercultural communication.

In addition, the expansion of CCME for intercultural communication is imperative, especially when looking at a highly diverse group such as international students in the U.S. Due to the significantly high levels of diversity within this group, as researchers and scholars, we must be mindful about the plethora of intersecting identities, privileges, and levels of oppression and marginalization. As Urban and Orbe (2007) remind us:

This large group of individuals [international students] is extremely diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, language, political loyalties, socioeconomic background, cultural norms, and behavioral patterns; yet, they are frequently viewed as a homogenous outgroup unified by the status of being labeled as ‘foreign’ and ‘different’. (p. 118)

In addition to being a heterogeneous group of people, international students also often have different experiences with the concept of membership and insider/outsider, often shifting back and forth between being able to “pass” as an insider and being positioned as an outsider by the dominant cultural system (Urban & Orbe, 2007).

Diversi and Moreira (2009) emphasize that the betweener identity that incorporates the various cultural, social, and national markers is constantly renegotiated in the attempt to move back and forth between the person's multiple realities. In addition, Simonis (2012) found that many international students – to varying degrees – form hybrid identities when studying in the U.S., which only further emphasizes the necessity for intercultural relationships and dynamics to be included into CCME. In addition, CCME offers benefits for intercultural communication research as it calls for the critical inquiry of privilege and marginalization, as well as for critical self-reflexivity by the researcher.

The expansion of CCME for intercultural communication research, thus, is necessary and important as it addresses one of the major limitations of the methodology, which is the binaristic view of membership and identities. In complicating the notion of membership through the concepts of betweenness, hybridity, and outsider within, I have made the case that CCME's application can be, and should be, extended to intercultural communication and its approach to membership should take into account the current research arguing for the fluidity, intersectionality, and multiplicity of identities. Finally, my arguments do not critique the benefits and significance of CCME as a method, but rather expand it to a more inclusive and broader application for diverse, heterogeneous groups and participants, in addition to creating space for researchers who identify as betweeners, hybrid, mestizo/a, and/or beyond identity binaries.

### **Data Collection**

Critical complete-member ethnography (CCME) combines and functions at the intersections of ethnography of communication (EOC), critical ethnography, and autoethnography (see Toyosaki, 2011). In addition, "CCME collects data through the researchers' field observations, participant observations, ethnographic interviews, lived

experiences, and self-reflexive examinations” (Toyosaki, 2011, p. 66). For the purpose of this project, CCME was used as a critical method of inquiry within intercultural communication research that looks at how international students experience and negotiate the concepts of voice and silence within the U.S.-American classroom setting.

## **Participants**

For this research, I decided to divide my participants up into primary and secondary participants. The primary participants of this study were international students who volunteered to be interviewed by me for the purpose of my dissertation. The secondary participants of this study were the instructors of the classes that I observed and who were interviewed after the classroom observations had been conducted.

**International Students.** The primary participants for this research were international students who were over 18 years of age at the time of the interview and had completed at least one full semester at a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country. This restraint in choosing my participants was imperative as I wanted to understand how they have experienced and negotiated voice and silence in a classroom setting and a few weeks of lived experience in the U.S. seemed to be too short of a time period to draw valuable conclusions from. I conducted interviews with 18 international students who volunteered to participate in this study between March and July 2015. Upon final analysis, I conducted a combined 20 hours and 13 minutes of interviews with international students. In order for my readers to gain a better understanding of the demographic and academic background of my participants, I have created a table that provides a comprehensive overview. Table 1 (see below) includes the following information as identified/provided by the participants:

participant number, gender, age, home culture, field of study, degree currently being sought, and years spent in the United States as an international student.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

<b>Participant<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Home culture</b>	<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Time in U.S.</b>
1	female	36	South Africa	Media and Communication	Ph.D.	3 years
2	male	28	Saudi Arabia	Computer Science	B.S.	4 years
3	male	27	Japan	Communication Studies	Ph.D.	4 years
4	male	27	India	Chemistry	Ph.D.	3 years
5	male	43	China	Curricular Instruction	Ph.D.	6 months
6a <sup>8</sup>	male	31	Israel	Social Work	M.A.	2 years
6b	female	27	Israel	Art History	B.A.	2 years
7	female	32	Taiwan	Communication Studies	Ph.D.	8 years
8	female	45	Malaysia	Workforce Education	Ph.D.	7 years
9	male	30	Honduras	Spanish and Communication Studies	M.A.	2 years
10	female	26	China	History	Ph.D.	1 year
11	male	25	Brazil	Counseling Psychology	Ph.D.	8 months
12	female	24	China	Workforce Development	M.A.	1 year
13	male	25	Iran	Engineering	M.A.	2 years
14	female	35	India	Anthropology	Ph.D.	7 years
15	male	28	France	Communication Studies	M.A.	4.5 years
16	male	33	China	Communication Studies	Ph.D.	4.5 years
17	female	36	Republic of Congo	Communication Studies	Ph.D.	7 years

<sup>7</sup> I would like to be transparent here and recognize that numbering my participants may be considered dehumanizing given that I locate my research within the critical paradigm. The participants were given the opportunity to select pseudonyms at the beginning of the interviews. However, the participants expressed that they didn't want to pick pseudonyms to stand in for their names in this project.

<sup>8</sup> Initial correspondence only happened with participant 6a. On the day of the interview, he had invited his partner to join us for our conversation as she had expressed a strong interest in the study as well. The participants and I decided to conduct a joint interview that followed the same procedures as the other interviews included in this study.

Since the examined university had a total of 1,744 international students enrolled (699 at the undergraduate and 1,045 at the graduate level) at the time of data collection, 18 participants may not seem like a level of participation representative of this institution. However, the qualitative argument to that is the depths and richness of the interviews provided a sufficient amount of data to be analyzed and allowed me to draw valuable conclusions regarding the implications of voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom of a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country.

**Instructors.** The secondary participants for this research were instructors who had international students enrolled in their classes during the summer 2015 semester. In total, I interviewed seven instructors whose classes I had observed during the summer session. I conducted a combined 7 hours and 53 minutes of interviews. In order to make the demographic and educational information about the participating instructors more accessible, I decided to create a table that includes the following information as identified/provided by the instructors: gender, age, home culture, field of study, level of instruction, and years of teaching experience. I would also like to mention at this point that the majority of the instructors who volunteered to participate in my research turned out to be teaching assistants (TAs) and almost all of the instructors identified communication studies as their major field of study. I elaborate on this limitation further in Chapter 7 but feel that this limitation is warranted to be mentioned at this point as well.

Table 2: Demographic information of participating instructors<sup>9</sup>

<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Home culture</b>	<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Level of instruction</b>	<b>Experience</b>
1	female	51	U.S.-American	English, Creative Writing, Linguistics	Senior Lecturer	22 years
2	female	31	U.S.-American	Communication Studies	Teaching Assistant	3 years
3	male	25	U.S.-American	Communication Studies, Performance, Gender/Sexuality Studies	Teaching Assistant	3.5 years
4	female	42	U.S.-American	Communication Studies	Teaching Assistant	6 years
5	male	27	Japan	Communication Studies	Teaching Assistant	8 years
6	queer	33	U.S.-American	Communication Studies	Teaching Assistant	7 years
7	male	over 60	U.S.-American	Communication Studies, Conversation Analysis	Associate Professor	40 years

### Participant Solicitation

Upon receiving Human Subjects (IRB) approval for my research study, the first person I contacted was a member of the Center for International Education (CIE) who is in charge of the international student listserv on the campus where the study was conducted. I requested her to send out a participant solicitation email that included the cover letter, at two points during the summer 2015 semester. International students, upon receiving the email, were asked to contact me directly in order to receive further information about the research project and to schedule an interview with me at their convenience. In addition, a participant solicitation call was posted on

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<sup>9</sup> I want to highlight here as well that only one of the participating instructors identified as non-U.S.-American, while all of the other instructors identified as being born and having grown up in the U.S.



my personal social media (Facebook) page asking for interested students who meet the criteria to contact me should they be interested in participating in the project.

The solicitation of instructors was conducted via email. Potential courses were identified through accessing the online course catalog of the university at which the study was conducted. Due to the fact that the classroom observations were conducted during the summer semester, only a limited number of courses were available which made the selection process easier. Courses were selected based on their format (i.e., they had to be on-campus rather than online courses), their level (i.e., I wanted to have an even number of undergraduate and graduate level courses for comparison purposes), and the college/department they were listed in (i.e., I wanted to represent a variety of different departments represented in the study). After selecting potential courses for inclusion in the study, I sent emails to the assigned course instructors with a brief explanation of my research, an inquiry about international student enrollment, and the solicitation materials. Courses that had international students enrolled and to which the instructor granted my participation request were selected for my study. Two to three appointments were set – one towards the beginning of the semester, the others towards the end of the semester – for me to attend class and conduct my classroom observation. The interviews with the course instructors were scheduled for a time after the initial observation in their respective courses.

## **Interviews**

My primary method of data collection involved conducting qualitative interviews with both the primary and secondary participants. During the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview protocol which allowed for an open dialogue between the researcher and participant. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the concept of epistemological intimacy is a core value of CCME research as it speaks to relationship-building between the researcher and the

participant. Since I had no prior relationship with many of the research participants, using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendices B and I) that allowed for a more open and organic dialogue helped build an initial relationship between myself and my participants. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explain, “the ethnographic interview – also known as the informal conversational interview ... – is the most informal, spontaneous form of interviewing” (p. 176). This open approach to interviewing also allows both the researcher and the participant to negotiate their identities and create a unique research site based on dialogue.

Due to the nature of the research, participants were required to sign a consent form that documents that they were participating in the research willingly and that they were agreeing to be voice-recorded during the interviewing process:

Audio recording ... is capable of capturing and preserving all of the interview discourse with little effort by the researcher. Rather than slavishly writing down what is being said, the interviewer can sit back ... and engage more fully in the conversation. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 192).

Audio recording during the interviewing process aids in making the interview feel more like a conversation between two people. This, in return, can relieve a lot of pressure and alleviate stress on the side of the interviewer and the interviewee in particular if the interview is conducted in a language other than their mother tongue. Since all of the interviews were conducted in English, this seemed to be an important thing to note. Finally, the interviews were transcribed and used for coding (a process I will describe in detail in the data analysis section).

### **Classroom Observation**

In addition to conducting interviews, I visited seven different classes during the summer 2015 semester that had international students enrolled at the time of the observation. Lindlof and

Taylor (2011) call this process fieldwork or participant observation which is a process defined as “the craft of experiencing and recording events in social settings” (p. 135). In this case, the social setting was the U.S. American classroom at a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country. Two of the observed courses were 400-level courses with students pursuing their Bachelor’s, Master’s, as well as doctoral degrees; one course was a 300-level course with advanced undergraduate students; and the remaining four courses were 100-level courses that are part of the required core curriculum for undergraduate students at the examined university. Before entering any of the classes to conduct my observations, I asked the instructors to check in with their students in order to get their approval as to whether or not they were comfortable with me conducting my observations. I wanted to make sure that this step was included because, in my opinion, classrooms are spaces that the students use to form communities and I didn’t want them to feel as if I was invading their communal spaces. Therefore, during my first class visit at the beginning of the course, the instructors would briefly introduce me to their students or allow me to give a short introduction of myself and my research. Thus, the students were aware of my presence and reason for being in the space from the beginning.

Over the course of the observed class, I took extensive fieldnotes that focused on how international students embodied and performed voice and silence during the class period. “Fieldnotes are concerned with describing and interpreting the symbolic (i.e., textual) qualities of communication as social action” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 155). During the class, I sat in the back of the classroom and tried to interact as little as possible with the learning community because I didn’t want to impact and/or change the classroom dynamic in any way. My means for identifying the international students in the classroom differed from class to class. Some of the

instructors with fewer students enrolled offered a brief introduction in which each student would introduce himself/herself. In other classes, the instructor identified the international students to me prior to the start of the class and in two classes I knew the international students enrolled. At the conclusion of my data collection, I had conducted a combined 23 hours and 20 minutes of classroom observations and extensive fieldnotes. The fieldnotes were used for data analysis purposes, in particular for the data discussed in Chapter 5 regarding international students' classroom negotiation of voice and silence.

One major limitation of the classroom observations was that all of the observed classes were within the College of Liberal Arts and, more specifically, mostly within communication studies classes. This limitation was due to the fact that out of the 25 instructors I contacted during my participant solicitation only 10 responded to my messages and only the seven participating instructors had international students enrolled in their classes. These seven courses were all in the Liberal Arts. I also want to be transparent and acknowledge that my presence in the classroom may not only have altered the instructor's behavior, but also the behaviors of the students. However, this very often is the case when conducting field observations within a space in which the researcher is not a member.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of data analysis, I used the qualitative research method of coding for my participant interviews and classroom observations. As previously mentioned, after conducting all of the participant interviews for this research I transcribed all of the audio recordings. The process of transcription involves bringing the audio recording to paper, with "the transcript [eventually] becoming the interview" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 211). In my transcription process, I made sure not to correct any syntactical or grammatical errors that occurred during the

interview because I didn't want to alter the participants' narratives and put my own linguistic lens over it. In doing so, I believe that the narratives the participants shared with me are more representative of their multiple and differently-cultured realities.

The second step in my data analysis involved coding the transcribed interviews and my classroom observations. After reading through all of my collected data, I started off by creating categories that helped me address my four research questions. A "category is a covering term for an array of general phenomena" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 246) that helped me to find themes within my data and to address my research questions. These themes, or codes, "are the linkages between data and the categories" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 248) that "serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data" (Charmaz, 1983, as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 248). For the purpose of the coding process, I color-coded all of my interviews and classroom observations with every color being assigned to a particular code in my codebook. The codebook was a working Excel spreadsheet that listed all of my categories, color-coded codes, and examples from interviews and/or fieldwork observation. This approach made my data accessible to me and allowed me to discover patterns between the different sets of collected data.

In the beginning of this chapter, I made the argument that CCME's application can be extended to *intercultural* (rather than only *intracultural*) inquiry. Employing the critical qualitative method of CCME for this project, I use the following chapter to autoethnographically situate myself within this project by articulating my own positionality within this research as a between researcher. Chapter 4, therefore, also serves as a means to address and expand the notion of membership as it is currently conceptualized within CCME through an autoethnographic account. In addition, in Chapters 5 and 6, I present and critically analyze the collected data mentioned in this section. I used my four research questions to structure the

chapters which, in my opinion, allowed for a more accessible discussion of the data for the readers.

## CHAPTER 4

### POSITIONALITY OF THE AUTHOR

Nepantla es tierra desconcida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement. – Gloria Anzaldúa (2012)

You live life in betweenness. – Claudio Moreira (in Diversi & Moreira, 2009)

The notion of membership and belonging has long troubled me as an individual as well as a researcher who focuses most of her work on international students. In previous research, I have often found that I had to make a lot of effort for fellow international students to see me as a member of the community. While I do identify as an international student, some of my various different identity markers do set me apart from the majority of international students who come from the global South. Hence, as a White, European, international student in the U.S. who focuses the majority of her work on international students, I have recently troubled my assumption that I am a complete member within this specific group of students. Indeed, international students are a very heterogeneous and diverse population in and of themselves. However, given that this research is conducted in a predominantly White, U.S.-American environment, I do tend to blend in more with the White, U.S.-American population on campus. I do feel that this point must be taken into consideration in a research project such as this one that uses the type of research methods I employed – namely, critical complete-member ethnography (CCME).

I, therefore, dedicate this chapter to positioning myself within this research project, a step I feel to be necessary in order to remain transparent to my participants and readers, as well as to remain accountable to my own privileges as a White, Western woman. Furthermore, this chapter

also serves as a means to push the conceptualization of membership within CCME further. I do this by complicating the notion of membership by incorporating the concepts of betweenness (Diversi & Moreira, 2009), hybridity (Bardhan, 2012; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013), and outsider-within (Collins, 2013). Due to the nature and participant pool of this particular research, I pose that the complication of membership is a necessary step because the notion of membership within diverse, heterogeneous groups such as international students is much more complicated than it might be in more homogeneous groups.

I start by providing an overview of how membership functions within CCME as a method for critical inquiry. Further, I outline the concepts of betweenness, hybridity, and outsider-within in order to complicate the notion of membership as it is used in CCME, as well as in qualitative research methods in general. I include “layered glimpses” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Ronai, 1995, 1998) – an autoethnographic method combining Ronai’s (1995, 1998) layered account, “an ethnographic reporting technique that embodies a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting” which “offers an impressionistic sketch, handing the readers layers of experience” (Ronai, 1995, p. 396), and Diversi and Moreira’s (2009) autoethnographic method of “glimpses” (pp. 17-18) – in order to underscore my personal negotiation of and struggle with betweenness as well as position myself as a researcher within this project. I, then, outline the implications of betweenness and membership for CCME as a method of inquiry within intercultural communication research.

### **Conceptualizing the ‘Betweenner Researcher’**

I selected the frameworks of betweenness, hybridity, and insider/outsider to complicate the notion of membership within CCME and move away from a binaristic conceptualization of membership. In doing so, I am not only moving towards a more inclusive and critical



conceptualization of membership within CCME, but I also hope to articulate and negotiate my own positionality as a betweener researcher. Therefore, I layer the majority of my glimpses throughout this section as I believe they best articulate my betweener researcher identity and allow me to situate myself within my research.

### **Approaches to Betweenness and Hybridity**

The concepts of betweenness and hybridity have been articulated in many different ways within contemporary scholarship. In this section of the essay, I particularly draw from scholars such as Anzaldúa (2012), Diversi and Moreira (2009), and Bardhan (2012) and their conceptualizations and articulations of these concepts. Diversi and Moreira (2009) define betweenness as “(un)conscious bodies experiencing life in and between two cultures” (p. 19), which resonates with Anzaldúa’s (2012) definition of ‘living on the borderlands’ which refers to a life between multiple countries, social systems, cultures, languages, etc. “The word ‘borderlands’ denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 6). Hence, betweenness is a dialogic process that combines different ways of knowing and being, as well as the concepts of outsider and insider.

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Insiders can be understood as a group of people with whom we share a certain amount of “sameness, familiarity, and joint experiential and knowledge bases” (Chuang, 2014, p. 5) and for “whom we feel concern, with whom we are willing to cooperate and for whom separation creates anxiety” (Sorrells, 2013, p. 206).

*Glimpse 1, Summer 2009*

I did it! I finally arrived! A student in the U.S.A.! I had always dreamed about coming to the United States to study; after all, who wouldn't want to do this? I feel accomplished, proud, and like I belong – like an American. This is a great feeling!

*Glimpse 2, Summer 2009 – International Student Orientation Week*

Meet-and-Greet with other international students? *I don't want this!* After all, didn't I come here to meet Americans? I don't want to be an international student – I want to be *American!*

Similarly, to many of my fellow international students, I had this desire to be American. Much of the discourse that surrounded me growing up in Germany positioned the U.S. as the land of the free where everyone's dreams can come true. Growing up in a modest, single-parent household, I too wanted an opportunity to make my dreams become reality and one way to achieve this goal was to live the American Dream. When I first arrived in the United States - a White, European, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered, agnostic, working class, female student – to study English, I thought that my white privilege (which at the time I wasn't even aware I had) would grant me direct access to U.S.-American society and make me an insider in this new cultural system. As a White, European person, I did not take into account the many privileges my nationality and racial identity provided me with. As Johnson (2006) reminds us, “the invisibility of whiteness illustrates how privilege can blind those who receive it to what's going on” (p. 120). I considered myself as an insider – that is, of White, American culture – who believed in binary oppositions and never even thought that anyone could consider me an outsider. Never having had to negotiate my many privileges that society has granted me by merely being born in a White

body and a European country, this seemed the “most natural” thing to me. As Kendall (2006) concurs, “if we only have our perception, we begin to believe that what we’re saying is true and that everyone shares our views” (p. 47). I did not realize then that within this conceptualization of myself, I discounted the many struggles, oppressions, and realities of groups of people who do not benefit from the same privileges as me. I rejected the label of “international student” – the foreigner, the Other, the outsider in this country. I read myself as an insider solely based on my White, European privilege.

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Diversi and Moreira (2009) argue that the concept of betweenness itself functions as the negotiation and disruption of binaristic systems that fix, limit, and put into opposition fluid, dynamic identities. They argue that the “dichotomous, binary, either/or, us/them view of the world ... is dehumanizing and oppressive” and yet, “at one time or another, we all have been ‘us’ or ‘them’ merely by virtue of perspective, not of personal value” (p. 21). They further argue, “we are claiming this position, between, not to fix our identities but to situate ourselves in socially constructed, fluid space ...” (p. 19). The space referenced here is also often framed as ‘third space,’ which positions “subaltern identities as unique third terms defining an in-between place” (Grossberg, 1996, p. 91) or the space of the ‘inter’ in which “oppressive binaries” are ruptured and transformation can occur (Bardhan, 2012). Anzaldúa (2012) further proposes that it is only in this in-between space that we can disrupt and change hegemonic epistemologies that have been used to marginalize and oppress certain groups of people. Betweenness, then, can be understood not only as a space of inclusion but also as a space of resistance and transformation (Sorrells, 2013) because of its potential to challenge the status quo. Bardhan (2012) refers to this concept as ‘bridgework,’ which aims to “create possibilities for transformation and intercultural

alliances” (p. 153). Hence, betweenness and hybridity can be understood as forms of resistance and spaces where our multiple, intersecting identities allow us to be both insider and outsider at the same time, depending on context and location.

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An outsider is considered as someone who does not belong or doesn’t fit “the norm.” Sorrells (2013) writes that outsiders are “groups of individuals who are seen as separate and different from us, are often perceived as unequal to our group, as well as potentially threatening” (p. 206).

*Glimpse 3, Spring 2012*

Jana: “Hi, my name is Jana and I am doing research on how international students experience feelings of belonging, displacement, and home. Thank you for volunteering to participate in my project, I really appreciate it.”

Interviewee: “No problem. I am happy to help out with a project like this – I think it is very important and can be very beneficial for international students. I wonder though if it weren’t more appropriate for an international student to do this type of research?!”

Jana: “Oh, but I *am*. I am from Germany.”

Interviewee: “No, I mean a *real* international student. You say you’re German, but it’s probably your parents who came here from Germany and you grew up here and you are actually American.”

Jana: “No, I am *actually* from Germany. I only came here less than 3 years ago. I *am* an international student.”

Interviewee: “Oh, but you are *so* American!”

*Glimpse 4, December 2010, Düsseldorf, Germany*

“Jana, I don’t even know who you are anymore! You are so American! What is wrong with you?” Hearing this from one of my childhood friends, a person I have known for almost my entire life, is not only surprising, but it is hurtful at the same time. I feel like I do not belong here anymore.

It came as a big surprise to me that both international students and people in my home country, all of a sudden, situated me as an outsider. As a White, Western person, I never knew this feeling of being an outsider – my privileges have guarded me from this my entire life. The whole time, I thought that what I wanted was to be American. Now that I wanted to be acknowledged as a member of multiple groups – international and German – I was positioned as an outsider because I was perceived as too American.

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These glimpses, in particular, evoke in me the feeling that the opposition of insider/outsider is not only limiting, but indeed perpetuates oppressive systems. After all, if we just remain in our “designated group” – either insider or outsider – we never have to question our assumptions of how privilege operates and we do not have to acknowledge how we are compliant with it. As Johnson (2006) points out, “for white privilege to work, whites need the compliance of other whites” (p. 120).

While the notion of betweenness does aid in blurring oppressive and limiting conceptualizations of identity roles and membership as binaristic, we still need to remain accountable to our privileges within our intersecting between identities (Jankie, 2004). That is to say, just because I identify as a betweener, for instance, does not mean that I am not still

privileged in many ways. I believe that this consideration is very significant, especially when conceptualizing betweenness for a critical method such as CCME.

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*Glimpse 5, Summer 2011*

I am taking my Critical Race Theory (CRT) class this summer. I think that this is the first time I have heard the word “privilege.” It is overpowering. I feel like I was blind all these years! How could I have been so blind? But then, that is the thing about privilege, isn’t it?!

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The constant re-negotiation of our multiple identities – as researchers and group members – is, therefore, imperative as CCME does call for critical self-reflection on the part of everyone involved in the research project. Furthermore, I think that accountability and negotiation of privileges are imperative when claiming a betweenner status so we can ensure that we are not complicit in systemic oppression and marginalization. After all, “power relations [remain] paramount to the in-avoidable co-construction of our identity” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 20). This step is especially important in regards to negotiating our privileges, because as we can see from Glimpse 5, privileges are easy to ignore when one is benefiting from them.

This conceptualization of betweenness and hybridity is imperative in my attempt to deconstruct the dichotomous articulation of membership within CCME. In particular, due to the commitment to disrupting binaries, as well as my personal connection to the concept of betweenness, this framework can be regarded as a valuable addition to CCME and has the potential to expand the notion of membership. Finally, Diversi and Moreira’s (2009) argument that we are all betweeners opens up the possibility of CCME for intercultural communication research as it allows us to move towards a more diverse space of communality.

## Approaches to Insider/Outsider

In 1986, Patricia Hill Collins published one of her most famous works that many researchers and scholars still draw from today. In *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 1986), Collins introduces the notion of outsider-within, which describes “a state of belonging, yet not belonging” (Collins, 2013, p. 66) and served as a way for her, and others, to negotiate “unequal powers” between groups (p. 10). While the concept was originally designed as a framework for Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and was supposed to create a space for Black women’s voices and epistemologies to be shared and heard, Collins soon found that many other scholars caught on to the concept of outsider-within and started using it within different frameworks. While at first Collins seemed to push back against the “re-appropriation” of her concept that no longer only centered Black women, she addressed the outsider-within concept again in her work *On Intellectual Activism* (2013) and articulated that she recognized that oppression and marginalization can happen within a number of different identity groups – ranging from race, class, gender over sexual orientation and religion to nationality and ability. Hence, she expanded her own conceptualization of the outsider within, arguing that “critical consciousness of the need to remain attentive” to scholarship and in-betweenness:

is what distinguishes oppositional knowledge developed in outsider-within locations both from elite knowledge (social theories developed from within centers of power, such as whiteness, maleness, heterosexism, class privilege, or citizenship) and from knowledge developed by oppressed groups whose energies are consumed by one especially salient form of oppression (e.g., patriarchal Black

cultural nationalism, a racist feminism, or a raceless, genderless class analysis).

(Collins, 2013, p. 68)

Hence, outsider-within knowledge creates a specific type of epistemology – one that functions in the space between privilege and oppression and can produce “oppositional knowledge” (Collins, 2013, p. 68) which is attentive to systemic power and oppression, but at the same time provides spaces of multiple epistemologies from a variety of different angles.

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*Glimpse 6, September 18, 2014, Dinner with my best friend*

Friend: “Remember my student I had told you about who was causing so much trouble in my class?”

Jana: “Yes, I remember you telling me that she seemed to have issues with the concept of multiple realities and trying to understand an international student’s narrative?!”

Friend: “Exactly! ...So, the other day, I realized that she had become nicer towards me, was trying harder, and was more open to my teaching and the materials we talked about...”

Jana: “That is awesome!”

Friend: “...Yea, so I took her aside after class and mentioned how impressed I was and that I could notice her change in behavior and attitude. And then, she told me that it was only because I had mentioned that I was most likely planning on returning to China after graduating and I turned out not to be ‘one of those’ who come here and stay.”

I was speechless after hearing this story and crushed that no matter how long we would be in this country, we would always remain outsiders. But then, I also could not help but think that due to my white privilege – a privilege that he did not have as a person of color from East Asia – I would probably be “one of those” where it would not be “as bad” if I decided to stay.



I am beginning to see what many of the scholars I have consulted mean when they talk about “conflicting identities” or being an outsider-within. I am an outsider in this country due to my nationality, but at the same time I am still more of an insider than my friend is because I do have white privilege (and he doesn’t) and, therefore, I do have the privilege of blending in with the dominant, White, U.S. culture. Hence, insider and outsider do intersect in my national and racial identities and position me in a space of betweenness where I am at the center, but at the margins at the same time. Additionally, my outsider/insider status is fluid and contextual, meaning that it is always in flux, always in motion, and always changing.

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Outsider-within research, hence, can produce critical knowledge that brings into dialogue and critically examines both privileged and marginalized epistemologies. Therefore, this research approach does not only disrupt the binaries between insider and outsider, but it also engages in radical, intellectual inquiry that is aimed to disrupt systemic power imbalances from the margins, as well as from the center.

Given this conceptualization, as well as framing of the outsider-within concept, I believe that this approach is very important in considering the expansion of CCME for intercultural communication. Firstly, CCME calls for social and cultural critique, as well as an ‘insider-looking-in-and-out’ approach. I argue that there is a clear connection between the call for social justice and social critique of CCME, and the commitment of the outsider-within concept to dismantle oppressive systems from the center as well as from the margins. CCME requires critical self-reflection by the researcher, as well as the participants, to analyze how the group may be compliant in oppressive systems; hence, this resonates with the idea of dismantling said

systems from the center and margins that Collins (2013) calls for. Furthermore, by disrupting membership binaries and creating an inclusive group discourse that takes into account the intersecting privileged and marginalized identities of the members, the outsider-within framework creates the possibility of the expansion of CCME to intercultural communication.

Within the meta discourse of postcolonial studies and identity theory, the insider and outsider dialectic is also often referred to as the Self/Other dialectic. While Self and Other are often conceptualized in binary opposition (Allen, 2004; Sarup, 1996), more recent scholarship (Bardhan, 2012; Pensoneau-Conway, 2012; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013) moves towards a dialectic approach of the Self and Other. Bardhan (2012), for instance, reminds us that the hybrid identity is the space where the Self and the Other intersect and has the potential to critique and disrupt the status quo by uncovering the historical and present systems of power and privilege that position the West above all other places. Moreover, Pensoneau-Conway (2012) argues that “in the ‘cooperation’ component of Freire’s theory of dialogical action, the dialogical Subject recognizes that the I and the thou are interdependent, and I would not exist without the thou” (p. 47). Hence, the Self needs the Other in order to define itself and become part of existence:

Further, we cannot comprehend our identity without accounting for how identity is enmeshed in a context, and more specifically, in the context of embodied social relationships. These relationships provide the epistemological and ontological foundations for coming to know the self and the other. “I’m never just ‘I,’ but I am ‘I’ because I am in a relationship with ‘you,’ creating ‘we.’ Likewise, ‘we’ are never just ‘we,’ because we are situated in a larger social context. We are intersubjective beings. (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 565)

In other words, the Self and Other, the insider and outsider, the member and the non-member are not just interconnected but they also help to contextually situate and function in dialectical tension with each other. Furthermore, they can also exist within the same body. The conceptualizations of membership and insider/outsider within the framework of “outsider-within” and the Self/Other dialectic, thus, further aid in disrupting the divide between insider and outsider and create the opportunity for us to move towards a dialogic conceptualization of membership within CCME.

### **Moving Towards a Dialogic Conceptualization of Membership within CCME**

Disrupting binaries has been an important task for many scholars and researchers in recent years (Anzaldúa, 2012; Freire, 2003; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Smith, 2012) as it limits our conceptualization of different epistemologies and disrupts the continuing Western colonization of knowledge and knowledge production. Furthermore, as binaristic thought patterns mostly adhere to Western epistemologies, dialogic approaches to different issues are framed as a way to decolonize not only academia, but also our conceptualizations of different realities. As the conceptualization of CCME for intracultural research foregrounds the notions of sameness, familiarity, and shared epistemologies (Chuang, 2014; Toyosaki, 2011), I believe that a shift towards a dialogic approach to membership and the understanding of insider/outsider dynamics can be beneficial in advancing CCME not only for critical communication research, but also for *intercultural* communication research.

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*Glimpse 7, January 2011, Dulles Airport, Washington, DC*

I am standing in the Immigration line waiting to go through the Homeland Security Check-Point. I am nervous. Scared. Do I have all of my papers in order? Passport? Visa? I-20? University

statements? Looking at the number of documents that are required for me to move from the international airspace to “official” U.S.-American grounds makes me realize: I am *not* one of them.

*Glimpse 8, Summer 2011, after completion of CRT class*

Being American doesn't seem that great anymore.

I have come to realize that our realities do not exist in binaries, and identities and membership roles are anything but ‘clear cut.’ I can be an insider one moment and shift back towards outsider within a heartbeat. In addition, I have become aware that privileges and marginalization intersect within my body and how my previous behavior has made me compliant in the systemic oppression of bodies of color. I have not taken into the account how the history of my country has involved me in the colonization of bodies that do not have Western/European privilege. I am grateful that the “blindness of privilege” have been removed from my eyes and I now engage in critical self-reflection and am aware of my own privilege. I need to remain vigilant.

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As the previous discussion on conceptualizing between researcher has shown, identity categories are not ‘clear cut’ and binaristic. Rather, identities are intersecting, multipliable, fluid, and never complete (Collins, 2009; Hall, 1996; Sarup, 1994). Insider research or complete-member research often conceptualizes the notions of insider and outsider in dichotomous opposition, including CCME. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) remind us, however, the notion of complete opposites is false because being a member of a certain group does not mean that every member is exactly the same. In addition, the idea of multiple, intersecting identities that

underscore our similarities as well as our differences, “is the origin of the space between” and “the foundation that allows for the position of both insider and outsider” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). Therefore, I pose that given the previous discussion on betweenness, as well as my own positionality as a betweener researcher, the conceptualization of membership within CCME is limiting and not inclusive of people who identify beyond identity binaries. As Greene (2014) argues, “the boundaries between insider/outsider status can be blurred. Insideriness or outsideriness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations” (p. 2). In other words, the notions of insider and outsider are always partial and changing during the research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013), allowing for “the space between that allows researchers to occupy the position of both insider and outsider rather than insider or outsider” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 54). The notion of the ‘space between,’ then, challenges us to move away from a dichotomous conceptualization of insider and outsider towards a more dualistic, fluid understanding of membership in which the researchers’ different positionalities shift back and forth based on space and place.

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*Glimpse 9, Fall 2013*

“Jana, I am glad you are on the International Student Council board. You will be our secret weapon! You are like one of *them*!” I look at the other board members. My body is the only White body in the room.

*Glimpse 10, Spring 2012*

I have completed my Master’s research report exploring the notions of home, identity, and hybridity as they are experienced by *us* international students studying in the United States. I feel

like I have arrived in this “magical” both/and space where I am comfortable to be an international student. I have connected with so many of my research participants – my fellow international students. We share so much in common. I am embracing my own hybridity and am no longer trying to be an either/or. I am an international student. I am both/and.

*Glimpse 11, September 29, 2014, Text message received from a fellow member of International Student Council*

“I saw the German club having their fundraising in front of Faner. They look like you lol”

My insider- and outsidership constantly shift back and forth – it is as if I am moving on a continuum. Furthermore, my multiple, intersecting identities start to inform each other, making me more aware of how my privilege and my marginalization intersect. At the same time, they are a site of constant tension for me, as I try to negotiate my identities and their implications within the larger system.

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As Glimpses 9, 10, and 11 demonstrate, our understanding of membership needs to be more fluid as people constantly shift back and forth between different membership roles, insider/outsider, Self/Other, privilege/marginalization. Thus, I argue that we should conceptualize membership as dialogic and more fluid within CCME research. When negotiating membership in certain groups, participants may often identify certain behaviors or aspects of the researchers’ identity that may position him/her as more or less as an insider or outsider (Subedi, 2006). Therefore, I propose that it is important to pay further attention to the notion of being “*more or less* of an insider or outsider” (Roepstorff & Bernhard, 2013, p. 164) That is, we need

to look at membership not as a fixed concept but as functioning on a continuum (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014).

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*Glimpse 12, Fall 2013*

I got elected to be Chief of Staff of the International Student Council (ISC). What an honor to be selected by my fellow international students to be one of their – *our* - representatives! I am excited to meet new international students – I *am* one of them after all.

*Glimpse 13, Spring 2014*

I had embraced this label of hybrid for so long and was proud to announce it as one of my identity markers. I *am* both/and. But, can I be both/and if people around me all read me as an either/or – either U.S.-American, or International Student? Embracing my own hybridity sometimes makes me forget that while I might be marginalized in certain ways, I still have many privileges. Yet, sometimes, I do forget my privileges, because I *can*. But then, that is the thing about privilege, isn't it?!

In my struggle of people being able to acknowledge my betweenner identity, I am reminded of the concepts of ascription and avowal. Martin and Nakayama (2010) define avowal as “the process by which individuals portray themselves” (p. 166). Ascription “is the process by which others attribute identities to them” (p. 166). However, they also remind us that ascription and avowal are in tension with one another, as our ascribed identities do not always match our avowed identities. When identifying as a betweenner, these concepts consequently become more

complicated as “betweenness” is not perceived as a “traditional” identity category and, thus, disrupts binary perceptions of identities.

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By conceptualizing membership of the researcher on a continuum, we are more accountable to the fluid and changing nature of our identities, as well as the idea that we are always insiders as well as outsiders (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). “A dialectical approach [to membership] allows the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences. In a dialectical approach, differences are not conceived as absolute, and consequently the relation between them is not one of utter antagonism” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). In my opinion, CCME can become more versatile if it takes into consideration the fluid and dialectic conceptualization of membership.

The following chapter focuses on how international students at the examined U.S.-American university have experienced and negotiated voice and silence in their time as international students in U.S.-American classrooms. It is here where I present my data collected from the interviews with my international student participants. As previously mentioned, I chose not to correct any grammatical or syntactical errors that were recorded during the interviews in order to represent the participants’ most authentic voices and narratives. I find this step very significant as ‘fixing’ the grammatical and syntactical structure of their narratives would not only make them less authentic, but it would also add a Western, hegemonic, and colonizing layer to the experiences and epistemologies of these students. Since this project is aimed at deconstructing these exact notions, I, therefore, find this disclaimer imperative. In addition, in order to remain in line with the tenets of CCME, I wove in my own personal narratives and experiences with the narratives of my participants, thereby not only strengthening my membership within the group, but also adhering to the autoethnographic commitments of CCME.



## CHAPTER 5

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF VOICE AND SILENCE

and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid  
– bell hooks (1989)

\*Ping\* - The instructor sets down her chimes. “Close your eyes, if you feel comfortable doing so, or just let your eyes gaze into nothing.” I close my eyes. Why not give this thing a shot? “Take a deep breath in.” This is weird. “And breathe out.” I take a little peek around the class. Most students have their eyes closed and seem fully engaged in this meditation. I close my eyes again and give it another try. “Take a deep breath in. And breathe out.” My mind is racing while I try to listen to the instructor’s voice guiding us through this breathing exercise. Why are we doing this? This is stupid. Why do I think it’s stupid? I don’t feel comfortable having my eyes closed. But why? Are we going to do this every time now? I shift in my seat. “Take a deep breath in. And out.” The noise in my mind starts to quiet down. I can feel my body relaxing. I start to feel more comfortable. \*Ping\*

I remember that it took me almost an entire semester until I felt comfortable with the silence that we engaged with at the beginning of every class during this one semester. Growing up in and being socialized into a West-centric system in which silence is understood as something negative and something that makes you feel uncomfortable, I guess I was just following the social “script” that was engrained in me from birth. It was through this breathing exercise, too, that I first realized how loud silence is and how deafening it can be – my brain filled with all of these non-ending questions that wouldn’t stop trying to break this silence that I

was trying to create within myself. In these moments, these very loud, internal moments, silence wasn't absence of sound – as it is often defined within the West-centric canon of literature trying to define and fix the meaning of silence (see Kalamaras, 1994; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985) – but it was a transformational moment in which I embarked on the journey from resistance over questioning to embracing of silence as a form of inner peace. It was also in this moment that I came to know that there is indeed much more to silence than many of us may believe, and I think it was one of the deciding moments in which I chose to make the concept of silence the center of this very study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for the purpose of collecting data for this project I interviewed 18 (self-identified) international students who volunteered to participate in this study. In addition, I conducted a combined 23 hours and 20 minutes of classroom observations in seven different classes over the course of one semester. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings from my analyzed data derived from both the international student participant interviews as well as the classroom observations. In order to allow for a more structured approach of data presentation and to make the discussion more accessible to my readers, I use the previously presented discussion questions as a means to structure my findings. In addition, the codes that were identified during the data analysis process are used to further structure this chapter and, therefore, are designated as subsections within this chapter.

### **RQ 1: How Do International Students in the U.S. Conceptualize Voice and Silence?**

As the previous theoretical discussion of voice and silence has illustrated, there are many differing and opposing views of what voice and silence mean. Much scholarship, therefore, has reinforced the binaristic view of voice and silence as polar opposites. In this section, I, therefore, start off by offering the different understandings of voice and silence as articulated by my

international student participants. In addition, I further unpack the varying reasons for and causes of classroom silence among international students in the U.S.-American classroom. In doing so, I not only present the findings from the conducted interviews, but I also include different autoethnographic reflections of my personal experiences as they relate to the discussion, as well as the observations from my different classroom visits. By doing this, and in following the commitments of Critical Complete-Member Ethnography (CCME) (Toyosaki, 2011), I hope to present a well-rounded, dialogic picture of my research.

### **Meanings of Voice**

Because of my multiple identities intersecting between privilege and oppression, I never really spent much time thinking about what voice really means. I took it as something for granted for me as a White, European woman. It was not until much later that I realized that my conceptualization of voice and my taking it for granted came from a very privileged space, a space that was created through years of exposure to and socialization into Euro-centric ways of knowing and Euro-centric ways of creating knowledge. Hence, my conceptualization of voice, my right to speak and to be heard, my right to impose my epistemologies onto you, were built upon my privileges that allowed me to ignore and silence the voices of others – the voices of the Other. The concept of voice, therefore, is an important one to explore, because as Paulo Freire reminds us, “oppression is best understood through the voices of those who experience it” (as cited in McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 64). The significance of voice was one aspect that the participants agreed upon as well:

Participant 8:

Being able to speak your mind is voice.

Participant 4:

Right of freedom, right of speech. ... So voice is something helpful.

Voice, here, was understood as agency by participants and as a way to express themselves. As Malhotra and Rowe (2013) argue, “to have voice is to utilize the agency to speak for oneself. Voice is agency, visibility, location, determination, and power” (p. 202). Voice, therefore helps us to locate our Self within society and within our broader discourse community by articulating our thoughts and feelings (Jack, 1991). However, participants also pointed out that while one can voice one’s opinions and feelings, one important aspect related to voice is also the idea of being heard:

Participant 6a:

Voice and silence can be understood as a student being heard, if he is being heard, if he uses the opportunity to be heard.

Participant 11:

Voice is being able to express your opinions and being heard. ... So I think being acknowledged has to do with voice.

What these two participants touch on is a very important aspect that relates back to Freire’s argument about oppression mentioned above, as well as the question I pondered in previous chapters of who is actually listening to our voices and narratives. As Boler (2004) points out, “what is ultimately most significant to dialogue is not the talking by the marginalized, but the hearing by the dominant group” (p. 65). This conceptualization of voice, therefore, already touches on the complicated relationship between voice and silence and the significance of being heard. Because this is an important dynamic to explore, especially within the realm of this particular project, this topic is expanded upon further in the following section.

Since this project also looks at classroom experiences and pedagogical praxis, I also find it important to briefly explore the conceptualization of voice within the classroom setting. This, of course, is not to say that voice in general and voice in the classroom are two distinct or inherently different things, but I want to make sure to also create a space to address classroom praxis in particular. “Critical pedagogues speak of student voices as ‘sharing’ their experiences and understandings of oppression with other students and with the teacher in the interest of expanding the possibilities of what it is to be human” (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 102). Within the classroom setting in particular, participants understood voice in different ways:

Participant 5:

I think voice is very important in the classroom and in instruction. It is a way for teachers and students to communicate with each other.

Participant 10:

I feel like voice means that you are given the chance to talk about your opinion and meanwhile the professor respect the chance that you got to express your opinion.

Participant 16:

I think voice means your right and your performance of sharing your opinion with your classmates and instructors. It means I obtain the right to speak out my own self related to a certain topic.

Voice in the classroom space, therefore, is understood as creating a space in which students’ experiences can be shared and where a dialogue can be created within the classroom community. Moreover, these conceptualizations can also be interpreted as international students being able to become part of the discourse community in U.S.-American classroom settings by joining a

conversation and opening up a space of possibility for intercultural exchange and learning. For marginalized people this can be a very powerful act because oftentimes there is little to no space for their voices to be heard. However, if the classroom community takes the opportunity to create this space and is open to this intercultural dialogue I believe it can be a very rewarding and mutually beneficial experience. As Luke and Gore (1992) explain, “by speaking, in their ‘authentic voices,’ students are seen to make themselves visible and define themselves as authors of their own world. Such self-definition presumably gives students an identity and political position from which to act as agents of social change” (p. 100). Voice, hence, can be a very powerful and empowering tool for students, and international students in particular, in order to situate themselves with the U.S.-American educational system. However, we should also not forget how complicated the notion of voice can be, especially in relation to our conceptualization of silence (particularly in the classroom setting):

Participant 14:

It [voice] can mean a multitude of things, it can mean teaching, it can mean participating, it can mean giving an opinion, it can mean disagreeing, it can mean being disrespectful, it can mean so many different things. It’s so very contextual.

Participant 16:

Voice and silence are not detachable. They are mixed. Because silence speaks, too. They both impact your agency and the sense of who you are.

Participant 3:

It [silence] is a different form of voice, a different form of communication. The meaning of silence depends on the specific context and the specific person I think.

The participants, therefore, not only view voice as agency and as a way to situate themselves within the larger discourse, but they also remind us that voice is a very complex concept that is linked to silence, especially when we think of the question of who and if someone is listening to the voices that are being shared. The next section of this chapter, therefore, attempts to unpack the complicated concept of silence, its relationship to voice, as well as the meanings and causes (as identified by the participants) of silence within the U.S.-American classroom setting.

### **Meanings of Silence**

The theoretical discussion of silence in Chapter 2 has already demonstrated how complex, contradictory, paradoxical, and communicative silence can be. When talking about their understanding and conceptualization of silence, the participants provided answers that were either a more general understanding of how they understood silence or they drew a direct connection to silence within the classroom space. Again, as I previously mentioned in the discussion of the concept of voice, while I do not see both of these conceptualizations as inherently different or opposing, for the purpose of structuring the presentation of my findings, I decided to start off with the more general discussion of how silence is understood by international students and then move into the more specific exploration of silence within the classroom setting.

As previously mentioned, silence is often understood as the opposite of voice, the absence of sound and voice, and as an oppressive force. However, according to Kalamaras (1994) “silence, too, is a rhetoric, and thus a way of making meaning” (p. 8) as well as “an authentic mode of knowing” (p. 8). The participants in this research agree that silence can be a productive space:

Participant 3:

I think silence can mean a lot. Silence is a way of performing something. Silence is a way you're listening, learning, and respecting people – so in Japan it is a good thing. But here, I still think silence is a good thing, but I think that it is often taken as bad behavior because people don't take silence as a good behavior because people don't share that context-based meaning. People here expect you to verbalize everything.

Participant 3 helps us engage with the complexities of silence and the varying meanings that it might have depending on one's cultural environment. In addition, he points out that silence can also be a very engaged process – that is anything from absence – but rather a way to silently, yet actively engage with one's surroundings. Other participants further touched on the notion of silence as an active process:

Participant 12:

I think sometimes silence gives you the room to think, you don't rush to give your opinion, you can have the silence to think about it.

Participant 14:

I guess silence could also be something where you are familiarizing yourself with something new. So it can be productive if it's engaged and active I guess.

Participant 15:

Silence is when you prepare to answer a question, that reflection you have to go through.

Therefore, silence is not only highly contextual and has multiple meanings, but it also allows for reflection and learning about a system that is different from one's own. Furthermore, while in



most West-centric discourse silence is seen as something negative, the participants pointed out that this is not the case in their understanding of silence:

Participant 13:

Peace. ... I am looking at silence like in a quiet class, listening, and it can be productive.

Participant 4:

Uhhmm silence is peace. And silence is giving space to some people and also to yourself. That's silence. And not polluting the atmosphere.

Silence, thus, in the classroom space and beyond can be something positive and desirable.

Boler (2004) points out that:

To a progressive educator, the silence of the other is most disturbing. It seems to signal not only a lack of dialogue but oppression and marginalization. Of course, from the point of view of the silent other, the decision not to speak may be rather less troubling and rather more eloquent than it appears; it may be a pragmatic rejoinder to a set of conditions beyond their control. (p. 60)

However, as participant 4 reminds us, silence can also be about creating a space for others to voice their opinions. Silence, therefore, can be interpreted as an act of compassion. Participant 16 also shared a story in which he decided to remain silent in the classroom when he noticed that the questions posed by the instructor appeared “too easy” and he decided to open the space for less advanced students to take the opportunity and express their thoughts instead of offering his own. It is, hence, imperative to not merely look at silence as oppression or something inherently negative – and I am not arguing that this cannot be the case as will be seen in the following

section – but to also look at silence as choice and as a productive space that can open up dialogue and be an act of including others into the discourse.

In the classroom space in particular, international students see silence as more complex and also draw a distinction between silence as it is perceived in West-centric classrooms:

Participant 7:

I do prefer and tend to be the quiet one in the classroom. But I do pay very close attention as always. I just don't speak up as much as my other classmates would because it takes me some time. So from the outside, a teacher who is more used to the Western style of teaching or instruction, he or she would probably think that I am not paying attention or don't have anything to say or am not participating at all. But in my brain, in my mind, I'm really working hard and there are a lot of different things going on ... but it is just very hard to get it out of my mouth. Because it takes time to think and it takes courage to raise your hand and speak up and it takes a lot of energy just to focus and to share and not miss a point. So silence for me is a way, of course, I feel more comfortable being silent. But when it comes to producing a written work, I may be able to do it better than orally sharing or speaking up.

In her conceptualization of silence, participant 7 touches on many different issues that are also further discussed and analyzed in the following section. At this point, however, I want to expand briefly on two notions and those are the misinterpretation of silence by U.S.-American instructors and the notion of courage. Howard (2015) argues, “instructors must be careful not to automatically assume that international students’ lack of participation is indicative of a lack of interest in the course. In fact, their silence may be due to a lack of confidence” (p. 60). Wink

(2011) is in line with this argument as well, stating that “courage is related to voice; it takes courage for some to express their voice” (p. 86). I remember when I started taking courses as a Master’s student. In the back of my mind I kept thinking about the ways I had been taught to remain silent in the higher education classroom and to listen to those who were seen as smarter and more advanced in their studies than I was. So I observed a lot. I took a lot of notes. And then, after over a year of being silent in the classroom, I raised my hand. I remember how my heart was racing and how nervous I was. I started out slowly. I started sharing from my personal experiences and only shared narratives. It was my way of “testing the waters” because I felt unprepared to talk about abstract theories quite yet. It took a lot of time, it took a lot of courage to break the circle of silence I had built around myself.

With the complexity of the concept of silence, the participants articulated many different ways in which they have experienced silence. While the previous section was meant to be a brief overview of a general understanding of the meaning of voice and silence, the following section aims to unpack the different types and causes of silence that international students experience within the U.S.-American educational system.

### **Causes of Silence**

Going into writing this particular section of this chapter was really interesting for me. As the previous discussion has shown, the participants didn’t think of silence as a merely negative and oppressive concept but spoke about its complexities and understood it as a productive space of reflection, thinking, listening, and centering oneself. Interestingly, and I guess this speaks to the paradoxical nature of silence, when we talked about the personal experiences that international students have had with voice and silence within the U.S.-American educational system, the most prominent codes, or themes, derived from my data painted a painfully negative

picture. For the purpose of remaining concise in the following discussion, several less prominent codes were condensed into larger themes that I used to structure this section of the chapter. This section, thus, focuses on the causes of classroom silence as they are experienced by international students due to (1) invisibility and self-censorship, (2) being othered and being silenced, (3) language, (4) race and gender, and (5) culture.

**Invisibility and self-censorship.** The most dominant reason identified by my participants regarding silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting is that international students make the conscious decision to remain silent, which I refer to here as self-censorship or self-silencing. Wink (2011) explains that “we can be silenced by others, and we can also self-censor and self-silence, which is equally harmful” (p. 83). In unpacking the reason as to why international students choose to self-censor in the U.S.-American educational system, the overarching theme is the U.S.-centrism they experienced within the classroom setting which sent the message that (1) we don’t matter, (2) they don’t hear us or don’t want to listen, (3) being excluded and/or invisible, and (4) no space to participate.

***We don’t matter.*** The discussion here goes back to what many postcolonial, critical race theory, and black feminist thought scholars have talked about for a long time and that is whose epistemologies are included, valued, and shape our educational system today. The answer to this question, with no surprise, is that White, male, West-/Euro-centric epistemologies shape today’s educational discourse while excluding all other types of knowledges.

Ethnocentric monoculturalism continues to value White Eurocentric ways of thinking, feeling, behaving, and being that do not fit the racial reality of people of color. It is clear that the imposition of these standards on people of color

represents cultural oppression: the unjust, cruel, and harsh exercise of power over various groups in our society. (Sue, 2015, p. 106)

In addition to being unjust and cruel, it is also an exclusionary politic that is engrained in the U.S.-American educational system and sends a message that experiences and epistemologies that don't fit into the dominant discourse do not matter.

Participant 1:

I thought that diversity should be celebrated but in that classroom it was shut down and it all had to be American-centric. And it makes it hard to feel like you are part of a classroom community when you cannot participate because I am not an American and I don't have that frame of reference.

Participant 6b:

Sometimes it's also like, I have something really important to say but I don't think that it's that important for other people to hear it. ... I also keep silent if I am not sure of what to say and I don't want to say anything wrong and embarrass myself.

The international student participants here frame the idea of their voice not mattering within the context of how they read their U.S.-American classmates' and instructors' exclusion of and lack of curiosity for including different ways of knowing. Being exposed to an indifferent learning environment – like participant 1 – in which difference and engagement with difference is actively shut down is a problematic and exclusionary praxis. In addition, and as the participants point out, it can be a cause for international students choosing silence over expressing their thoughts and ideas with the classroom community. Participants 11 and 9 further expand on this point:

## Participant 11:

I think it happens to me a lot because my experience wasn't in the U.S. and my experience wasn't in English so it was just completely different backgrounds and situations and since it doesn't fit into the U.S.-American box, I feel like my opinions are very often ignored and I feel like they don't matter. I would say something and my fellow colleagues they just completely ignored it and pretended like it didn't happen at all. So in the classroom I felt silenced a lot and like I was not given a space to voice my opinions. Many times I've also chosen to be silent and not to say anything. Because if you're not going to get heard then why make the effort? I feel often there is no space for me to share my experiences. And that is very hard for me because it's something I feel passionate about and I love talking but it was just a very resistant and hostile environment to anything that is not from a U.S.-centric paradigm.

## Participant 9:

It's this imperial thinking that is in Western Europe and U.S.-America. And I am not part of that. ... And sometimes when you are from a small country then you need to learn things that are not about yourself. But here people don't need to know where Honduras is. People don't have the need to learn about Honduras. When it comes to voice and silence. I feel like we are the dispensable ones.

Here the participants articulate how the U.S.-centrism in their classes makes them feel as if their experiences don't matter and there is no space for epistemologies that may challenge or divert from what the other students in the classroom may have come to know as the norm. My classroom observations further substantiated the students' experiences. The majority of the

classes used very U.S.-centric examples when engaging in discussions. Furthermore, while observing instructor 5's classroom (the only classroom where the majority of students were international), it became painfully obvious that when two international students facilitated their chapter and brought up examples from their own culture, the majority of U.S.-American students seemed to disengage from the conversation which was indicated by blank looks on their faces. Participant 17 engages with this issue as well, linking the disinterest expressed by U.S.-American classmates to her feelings of invisibility within the U.S.-American educational system: "In the classroom some struggles I faced were invisibility and silence. My voice wasn't heard or my voice didn't matter and my body was invisible."

Therefore, U.S.-centrism and a tendency among instructors and classmates to favor U.S.-American materials and epistemologies is one of the main reasons why international students may be silent in the classroom. In response to feeling like their narratives – and as a consequence their lives and their Selves – don't matter or are invisible within this educational system, many students choose to self-censor and disengage from the conversation. In these instances, their silence can then be read as resistance to an oppressive educational system that is built upon the exclusion of the Other, or it can also be read as an oppressive silence in which the students feel devalued and excluded.

***They don't want to hear/listen!*** In this section we go back to the idea of voice being linked to other people listening to what is being said. In her work *Talking Back*, bell hooks (1989) argues that everyone does have a voice but there are certain voices that we choose not to listen to. She calls for a "paradigms shift – that we learn to talk – to listen – to hear in a new way" (p. 15). However, I think that unless we move away from U.S.-centrism in our educational system and learn to include multiple epistemologies and ways of knowing, we may still not be

heard. As McCoy and Rodricks (2015) point out, “how hard it is to learn from voices we do not want to hear and to learn to hear the voices we do not know how to hear” (p. 55). Many of the participants also shared narratives about how they have experienced their U.S.-American classmates’ resistance and/or unwillingness to listen to their stories:

Participant 3:

In this department there are so limited numbers of international students and sometimes in the class I am the only international student. And that makes it hard because sometimes I feel like I want to say something but then I think that they may not want to hear about it and decide not to say it.

Participant 9:

You are talking but you are not willing to listen to things that are different from what you think and you are exposed to. ... Many are passionate about their social issues and that is okay but they are not interested in looking at other cultures and viewpoints at all. Often I get this impression that they think of me like “Oh, he is just this person from a third world country and doesn’t even speak right.” So nobody ever told me that but that is the impression that I get.

Participant 11:

Feeling ignored also made me feel like I was not being heard at all. ... But I think being silenced again is a big thing, you know, people not listening or valuing your contribution at all or dismissing it.

What the participants articulate here again goes back to the idea of privilege – when you are privileged then you have the privilege to choose not to listen because in the end your positionality still allows you to benefit from the system. Furthermore, the resistance to listen to



epistemologies that might challenge your own would require listeners to engage in a critical dialogue and to deconstruct their own privileged positionalities – something that many people are still unwilling to do. However, I think that there are many benefits to listening to others; benefits in terms of being able to learn from each other, the opportunity for personal growth, as well as creating a space of exchange and dialogue that can help dismantle the system of oppression that silences so many of us. Unfortunately, many of us have never learned how to listen or had the need to do so. To further complicate the matter, “there’s a difference between simply listening and listening mindfully” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014, p. 191). Much of the research on active listening (Brown & Smith, 2007; Helgesen & Brown, 1995) provides instructors with strategies and activities that can be used to practice empathetic (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993) or performative (McRae, 2015) listening.

***Feeling invisible and being excluded.*** Another reason why international students are silent in the U.S.-American classroom is due to the feeling of being invisible or excluded. During my classroom observations, two instances in which international students were actively excluded caught my attention. They caught my attention, in particular, because the instructor in one instance didn’t do anything to mitigate the situation or to create a space for that student. The incident was observed in instructor 3’s classroom during a small group activity in which one international student was in a group with four U.S.-American students. Not only did the international student look disengaged but he also was purposefully excluded from the group activity which was indicated in the fellow group members’ turning their backs towards him and not creating a space for him to move into the smaller circle. It looked as if he were invisible to them. Furthermore, another incident was observed in instructor 6’s classroom in which two international students were excluded from a conversation between classmates about 10 minutes

before the start of class. At the time, the instructor, two international students, and two U.S.-American students were present in the room. The two U.S.-American students started talking over the head of one of the international students while entirely ignoring both of them. Again, this incident gave the appearance of the international students being purposely excluded from the conversation and appearing invisible. One international student also shared a similar experience with me during our interview:

Participant 17:

The invisibility of my black female body didn't make sense like how I am sitting in the class, someone walks in and doesn't say hi, but as soon as a white person walks in and you say hi to them. They just ignore you. ... By ignoring my stories they are also delineating my experiences and my life. And I feel silenced in these moments.

She continued to express how dehumanizing and painful many of these experiences were. The behavior of actively ignoring or rendering invisible of international students within the U.S.-American classroom setting was very unsettling to me. Two other participants also shared experiences of being excluded by U.S.-American professors because of their U.S.-centrism in the classroom:

Participant 10:

Because sometimes I know that even though I express my opinion but not every professor in our department is familiar with Chinese history and we were starting historiography last semester ... because I'm not quite familiar with the professors' fields of research like Ancient Roman history or Christian history so I always have to use my own source and Chinese history but then they are not familiar with

that. So even though I said that oh I know how the Chinese approach history but the professors are not familiar with it and sometimes are dismissive and cannot respond because they are unfamiliar with it.

Participant 14:

Some professors don't understand how our field of study works outside of America. I wouldn't say that she [one particular professor in her department] is racist because that's a really severe accusation to make but she does not understand how other cultures deal with the same field in a different manner. It was a big problem but she had these preconceived ideas. ... Just because it's not American doesn't mean it's wrong.

I think that one common thread between these different experiences with feeling invisible and excluded is again the U.S.-centrism the students experienced in the classroom that not only negates their experiences but their very presence in the room. As Fordham (1993) argues, the “socialization to silence and invisibility is not without pain” (p. 23) and “is also distressing because it isolates and alienates” (p. 24) and renders irrelevant a body that is not White, male, American, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, and upper-middle class.

*No space.* Another reason for international students' silence in the classroom was identified as there not being any space created in which they could articulate their thoughts and opinions.

Participant 8:

Sometimes there are students who talk a lot and then I stay silent because there is no room for me to talk if the person is talking the whole time. ... I want the instructor to know that I have experiences to share and I know things and have

opinion. But there is no room for me to share and it is disappointing because I may really want to say something.

Participant 17:

I feel like American students in the classroom think like they own the stage. They don't really care about international students and their struggles and their cultural background.

I remember being intimidated by the fast pace of the discussion in the U.S.-American classroom – something that I wasn't used to from back home. This pace was very challenging for me because it was very hard to follow the discussion at times. I also remember the students who take up so much space in the room that I felt like they would never stop talking and I would never be able to contribute. This also was the case in many of the classes that I observed during my data collection. In three of the observed classrooms (instructor 1, instructor 4, and instructor 5), three male U.S.-American students dominated almost every single classroom discussion to the point of shutting down other students' views and opinions, thus creating a very tense classroom environment (instructor 1's classroom) and interrupting and talking over other students in the class (instructor 4's classroom).

While the themes, narratives, and observations are discussed here under the section of self-censorship, I want to make sure that while many of these incidents were articulated in a way that may give the impression of “choosing” silence, the oppressive nature of U.S.-centrism in the classroom, as well as the behaviors of students and instructors in the classroom settings, can also be interpreted as active acts of silencing the students. However, I also don't want to create a dichotomy at this point as to what exactly renders something self-censorship versus being silenced as I believe the line is sometimes very hard to draw. In this chapter I have drawn the

distinction. However, I hope that we can look at it as a very thin one – for the sole purpose of providing a better and more structured overview of my findings. That being said, the following section will focus in particular on international students’ experiences with being Othered and being silenced.

**Othering and being silenced.** In this section I elaborate on the specific narratives and instances that the participants shared with me in which they felt that they were purposefully silenced by the instructor and/or their classmates. Much of the discussion, as before, centers on the issue of U.S.-centrism within the U.S.-American educational system that sets international students up to be excluded and/or silenced from discourse due to them being othered. Here I am referring to the process in which:

one is made the Other, as in binary opposition to the Self. The Self in this case represents the ‘norm’ which is part of the dominant discourse in society. The Other, on the other hand, is not part of the norm and hence, the dominant discourse and is often negated a voice. (Simonis, 2012, p. 2).

Several narratives were shared in which the participants articulated that they felt actively silenced because they were positioned as the Other in the classroom setting:

Participant 1:

And in this class we were not allowed to talk about our own countries. Everything that we spoke about had to be within an American context which made learning very difficult. Because then there was no frame of reference and once you would talk about your own frame of reference you would be shut up and she would say “Stop talking about your own countries, this is the U.S. and nobody can relate to

your story.” The U.S. classroom is so U.S.-narrowed and they don’t look at anything else.

Participant 6b:

America do think that they are doing it right and think that they are the center of the world. And they don’t care that other people and cultures are doing it differently. And that was very hard for us as international students coming here that people don’t recognize that other people and cultures are doing it differently. Because they don’t have to.

Both of the participants in this section call out the exclusionary thinking of many U.S.-Americans who believe that their ways of knowing and doing things is the same globally. As participant 6b articulates, many of these practices go back to the idea of U.S.-American privilege and quite possibly a lack of education about and interest in the rest of the world. In addition, participant 1 addressed the notion of colonizing the Other’s epistemologies by actively shutting down and diminishing their experiences and ways of knowing and telling them that U.S.-American epistemologies and ways of knowing and knowledge production are the only acceptable epistemologies. Participant 1 further shared:

Participant 1:

Some of the teachers are great, too, except for one. Whenever she spoke to me, in the classroom or outside of the classroom, she would say “Let me tell you how we do things here in the U.S.! I know you might be new in the U.S. but this is how we do things here.” I don’t know where she thought I was from, like if I live in the bush or something, but she would just talk to me in this condescending tone. And I remember I hated myself for a long time and one time I broke down in her

office and she didn't even look at me. ... She told me "You know, you're just not getting it!" And then I started talking to another international student and she would do the same things to him and he thought that it was only him. But she did it to both of us.

Participant 1 shared several narratives in which she articulated her experiences with U.S.-centrism and xenophobia and the harm that these behaviors have inflicted upon her as a human being, as well as a student. A learning environment in which ideas and epistemologies that may not fit – or dare challenge – the master narrative are not allowed is anything but acceptable. These dehumanizing practices silence international and other marginalized students within the larger educational system. Furthermore, they render students invisible and position them as the Other within the U.S.-American classroom setting. Other participants also shared narratives in which they felt othered within the classroom setting, specifically because of linguistic differences:

Participant 14:

You know sometimes even professors calling you out when you pronounce a word differently. Like we were discussing something and I said "vitamin" and pronounced it the British way. And the professor was like "Oh, vitamin, I love you foreigners." And I was like, well thank you for calling me out as the other in front of everyone. I thought it was very inappropriate. I know she didn't mean it in a mean way but still.

Participant 17:

I was taking another class with a professor and whenever I came to talk to her she would ask an American student to come in and translate. I took two classes with

her but I don't know why she would do that and ask someone to translate every time. And then I speak in English, then the American student says the same thing, and then she would speak. So how come that I was able to understand her but she couldn't make the effort to understand me? That also made me shy and silent in her class and impacted my performance in the class.

These participants focused particularly on how language and their different linguistic background were used as a means to humiliate and position them as the Other within the U.S.-American classroom setting. Language was one of the prominent themes that other participants also addressed and I, therefore, expand on it in the following section.

However, I, too, shared a similar experience in one of my classrooms in which I felt othered by the classroom community because of my different linguistic background:

Autoethnographic reflection:

I remember that one day in my language and communication class as if it were yesterday. We had read a chapter from our textbook for today's class discussion and the author had made a reference to Immanuel Kant. It wasn't that I was particularly familiar with Kant's work or a fan of his scholarship, but it was this little bit of familiarity, this little bit of German culture that had felt so far away for so long. It was a good feeling, this feeling of familiarity, and it gave me a sense of comfort. I wasn't a big speaker in that class by all means but I guess on that day, in that moment, this little sense of familiarity, of home, that I found in the printed name of an old, deceased, White, male, German scholar gave me confidence in that moment. I don't remember exactly what I said or what my argument was, I just remember that familiar name rolling off the tip of my tongue "Kant." The



entire class, including my instructor, started laughing uncontrollably for what felt like a couple very long minutes. I looked around the room, into their laughing faces, confused, hurt, my stomach tightening. What could I have said that was so wrong, so stupid that they would laugh at me like that? Then it hit me, my pronunciation of this familiar name, of the name that was a piece of home – I used the German pronunciation. A pronunciation, while correct, within the English-speaking community was an obscene reference to the female sex organ. I started to defend myself. I wanted them to know that I pronounced it this way because he was German and this is how you say the name. They laughed even harder. I didn't feel comfortable sharing in this class anymore for a very long time.

In addition to the narratives that were shared about instructors and students silencing international students in the classroom setting, as well as my own autoethnographic reflection, I was able to observe one incident during my classroom observations in which the instructor (instructor 7) checked in with the only international student in class to see whether or not he understood some of the slang and terminology used in a video. Even after the student had indicated that he did understand the terminology just fine, the instructor went on to explain the terms to him. While during my observation the instructor's behavior was meant to be helpful, I found issue with it because it was unsolicited, it singled out the sole international student in the class, and the Othering commenced even after the student had mentioned that he didn't need any further explanation.

The observation and the narratives shared in this section point to some of the hostility and/or dismissiveness that international students experience in the classroom setting by being Othered and through xenophobic comments and behaviors directed towards them. Not only does

this further separate them from their U.S.-American classmates, but it also is a process of actively silencing their realities, experiences, and narratives. The observation I shared in this section in particular also functions as a transition into the next reason identified for international students' practicing of silence in the classroom – language.

**Language.** In the previous sections, U.S.-centrism was the overarching theme that related the experiences of international students and their reasons for practicing silence in the classroom. Within the realm of language being a reason for silence in the classroom, the discussion takes us specifically in the direction of deconstructing English hegemony as a means to oppress, exclude, and silence people who do not speak English as a native language. Because of the history of European colonialism, English hegemony is a major topic discussed within postcolonial theory. For many international students, English, therefore, is “the oppressor’s language which has the potential to disempower those of us who are just learning to speak, who are just learning to claim language as a place where we can make ourselves subject” (bell hooks, 1996 as cited in Boler, 2004, p. 80).

A lot of research looking at international students and/or English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners, has identified the language barrier as the single and/or most important reason as to why international students do not participate in the English-speaking classroom (Brown & Smith, 2007; Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008; Howard, 2015; Kuo, 2011; Price & Nelson, 2014; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). While language was not identified as the only reason why international students are silent in the classroom, it was one of the factors mentioned by several of the participants during our interviews.

Participant 3:

Every time I talk my students recognize that I am not an English native speaker and sometimes I also make mistakes when I speak and I am so ashamed when that happens.

Participant 17:

“I wish non-native English speakers would get more attention to what we’re saying rather than how we say it and pointing to my accent.”

Participants in these narratives point out the immense pressure international students, and non-native English speakers in particular, may feel to linguistically perform as comfortably and effortlessly as their U.S.-American classmates. I remember in my interpretation classes in Germany how our instructors drilled us to lose as much of our foreign-sounding accent as possible because we had to sound as U.S.-American as possible when speaking English. These narratives also connect to the previous discussion on how language and linguistic differences may be used to position international students as Other within the U.S.-American classroom setting. Some of my participants further shared:

Participant 5:

Even though I have been learning English for many years when I was China, when I came here I couldn’t understand too much so it was really hard for me to communicate.

Participant 9:

The language influence too – I used to always be a very participating student but now, I’m still participating but sometimes I fail because sometimes my language

skills are not so that I can get the message across. ... Because it's difficult to organize your thoughts in a second language because I don't have enough experience with the language.

Participant 13:

Someone who is not a native English speaker they are not comfortable or not as comfortable with the language. So it makes it harder to participate in a discussion especially when the discussion partner is a native English speaker.

The fast pace of many of the discussions within the U.S.-American classroom setting can not only be very intimidating for non-native English speakers, but can also negatively influence their learning. As the participants mentioned, at times it is very hard to follow a discussion or we may struggle to organize and translate our thoughts fast enough in order to contribute to the classroom discussion. One participant even went so far to argue that her different linguistic background may have been the sole reason she felt excluded and chose to remain silent at times:

Participant 12:

I think my struggles are not in fact because I am an international student but because of my English. Students here respond so fast in the American class and speak well and immediately when they have an idea. But by the time I am ready to speak something the timing has passed away. So I am struggling with that.

Language, therefore, can have a tremendous impact on the progress of a student's learning and development. As educators, I believe we need to become more aware of these issues and use silence as productive spaces for reflection that may allow students to find the much needed time to translate and organize their thoughts. I expand on this discussion in much more detail in Chapter 6 when addressing pedagogical praxis in particular. Participant 10 articulated how a

little bit of empathy and awareness demonstrated by one of her teachers helped her in her struggle with the linguistic barrier in the classroom setting:

Participant 10:

The first professor, I emailed her and told her that I don't think I can contribute much opinion or much thought here to the class because I'm not because my English is not quite fluent and sometimes I don't know how to sort my thoughts and translate it into English, and I told her but she told me that's okay and I should just try and that she appreciate even if I cannot contribute much but at least are trying to do that.

I think the reason for language being a barrier for many international students may be that oftentimes we feel like U.S.-Americans students will judge us if we make grammatical, syntactical, or linguistic errors when articulating our thoughts. I know that this is also one of the major reasons that sometimes I am hesitant to participate – sometimes the words are just not there to express my thoughts in a given moment. In addition, whenever I choose to speak up in the classroom, I know how harshly I judge myself when I catch myself making a grammatical or syntactical error in front of everyone. It is this inner voice that speaks up: “O.M.G. – how stupid are you. Now everyone heard you make that mistake. This is how it would've been grammatically correct...! But now everyone knows that you're too stupid to even say a simple sentence in English!” Or the panic you feel after: “I cannot believe I made this mistake in front of xyz (usually someone you look up to or admire)!” However, aside from fearing to look stupid or embarrassing oneself in front of others, another reason for the language barrier may also be that translation takes a while.

As Fisher, Frey, and Rothenberg (2008) remind us, “we all know about the importance of wait time after posing a question; English language learners need more, especially if they are code switching in their brains as they translate between English and their first language” (p. 144). Finally, the idea of English hegemony that participant 17 mentioned in her comment is something that I can strongly relate to as well. It is the idea that “many also hold an ideological orientation that English is not simply another language but, in fact, a superior language” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 53). In addition, while my White, European body allows me to “pass” within the hegemonic U.S.-American system, it is always my accent, the moment when I open my mouth and utter a single word, that I am “outed” as a foreigner, as the Other, as the one who doesn’t belong. Therefore, language, and especially English hegemony, is still a big divider between Us and Them, and is oftentimes used as a means to silence non-native English speakers.

**Race and gender.** I want to start of this section by prefacing that I do not want to conflate race and gender as I do view them as separate hegemonic systems. However, only five of my participants mentioned either gender or race, or both, as reasons for being silent or feeling silenced in the classroom; I do feel that both race and gender are too important to be disregarded from my data but at the same time feel that combining the two allows me to present my data in a more concise manner. “Ethnicity and gender are both particular and powerful variables with impact on power, inclusion, exclusion, legitimacy, silence” (Julé, 2004, p. 17). Three of my participants articulated their struggle with being racialized within the U.S.-American system for the first time and it impacting how they viewed themselves as an individual, as well as a participant within the U.S.-American classroom setting:

Participant 1:

You know, what is entrenched is White, male dominance to be specific and so you then look at me and I'm black, I'm a foreigner, not only am I a foreigner – I'm an African. ... But because of my race ... it's like “Who am I to speak in a white, U.S.-American classroom.

Participant 3:

In Japan nobody says anything about my race or my language because back home I'm the majority race and I also am fluent in Japanese so nobody questions my authority there. ... Here it is totally different. I am a minority here – which I have never been before and people's perception of me shaped. I became a minority, an international student, a non-English speaker, and a person of color. Those differences brought me a lot confusion about how I perform myself.

Participant 7:

“Race-wise I think it goes back to stereotypes – Asians... I think many people think Asians are quiet.”

Griffin (2010) argues that Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) are particularly helpful theoretical frameworks to “interrogate the oppressive entrenchments of Western and U.S. American racial hierarchies throughout the world” (p. 4). For international students who experience being racialized for the first time when entering the U.S.-American educational system, race was identified as one of the reasons as to why they remain silent in the classroom. Furthermore, Fine (1992) reminds us that “institutions nonetheless participate in the very reproduction of class, race, and gender inequities,” (p. 116) and silencing people of color is an inherent part of said reproduction. In terms of gender, “silence has long been considered a

lamentable essence of femininity, a trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, or obedience” (Glenn, 2004, p. 2). Four participants, in particular, spoke towards gender and its relation to silence in the classroom setting:

Participant 1:

I think there is an expectation that women should put a break on their voice. And for a long time, in many societies, male dominance is entrenched; it’s what is welcomed. ... It’s this idea of “You’re a woman, know your place!”

Participant 7:

Gender definitely plays a role. Females traditionally should be more submissive, should be more accepting, not have as much opinions or their own voice and thoughts. I think gender for me as a female is probably more like a norm so it is not as odd if I am silent in the classroom but on the flipside if you are male and you are quiet and not as assertive, maybe people will think that you are not strong, you are not participating, you don’t have a clear mind. So I do think gender plays a role. So maybe it is playing in my favor because I’m female and I’m quiet and silent but stereotypically that’s how I’m supposed to be.

Participants 1 and 7 touch on a very important argument in their narratives – the idea that we are all socialized into viewing and interacting with people a certain way based on various identity markers. In this context, gender is the identity marker that shapes voice and silence differently. As the participants argued, excessively patriarchal cultures view women as needing to be quiet and submissive, and position outspoken women as undesirable and disruptive.



Participant 5:

Sometimes women are a little bit shy than men so they will be a little bit unwilling to utter voice. That is what I saw in China. When I teach, I saw that some boys much braver than female students. Some female students just kept silent in the classroom.

Participant 5, therefore, echoes what I argued before and that is how patriarchal systems still impact how we view acceptable behavior based on a student's gender. Participant 11 also shared in his narrative the critical moment in which he became aware of how voice and silence worked differently for him and his sister, actively engaging and deconstructing his male privilege:

Participant 11:

I think I am able to be more outspoken because I was raised as a boy and raised to be outspoken and was praised for that. But my sister had a very different experience where she was praised to be more submissive and quiet you know where they silenced her more because of her gender.

Within the academic canon on race and gender, silence in particular is seen as a form of oppression in which women and people of color have to fight to be heard and fight to create a space for their voices in order to push back against the hegemonic powers that position them at the periphery. The international students in my research corroborated this view of silence as oppressive as it relates to gender and race while at the same time identifying both concepts as socially constructed and culturally situated. In addition to gender and race being culturally situated and very contextual, the final element that international students identified as a cause for their silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting is culture, and culturally contextual perceptions of what classroom participation and classroom etiquette should look like.

**Culture.** The topic of cultural perceptions of classroom participation and classroom etiquette was interesting to me – and very telling of the global history of colonization and Eurocentrism. A lot of research on cultural meanings of silence looks at silence as a sign of respect and something that is encouraged in the classroom (see for instance Brown & Smith, 2007; Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008; Howard, 2015; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). What I was surprised to find with almost every single one of my participants was that silence appeared to be the “only” acceptable form of classroom participation:

Participant 7:

Coming from Asian/Taiwanese/Chinese culture, classroom participation that I am used to is sit quietly and listen to the teacher, take notes, nod your head, smile preferably so the teacher know you’re paying attention. And the teacher selects who speaks, so very rarely do we volunteer to answer questions. But there is a great difference between the U.S. system and the Taiwanese system because here they encourage voluntary speaking up and sharing their opinion and not really note taking – I think that is really based on personal choice.

Participant 15:

As far as the atmosphere in class, you listen to the teacher, take notes. Some teachers take time at the end of the class or seminar to ask questions – but those teachers are rare to find. And if you have a question and wanted to ask the teacher after class they would often say “Sorry, it’s too late. Class is over.” And you can send them an email but most often you don’t get a response and there are no office hours. And there is no teacher-student relationship really.

As the participants articulated, in many countries outside of the U.S. acceptable classroom etiquette is considered being silent in the classroom. Therefore, when one grows up in a system that values students' silence over discussion it can be very hard to adjust to a different understanding of what "performing student" looks like. As participant 3 pointed out, after all, in many countries – and Germany is one of them as well – voicing one's opinion in the classroom may have serious consequences:

Participant 3:

In Japan, you are afraid to speak up because when you make a mistake the teacher sometimes punishes you. And I grew up in that system for over a decade. And that was so hard for me because I wanted to know what my classmates were thinking and I wanted to have classroom discussion but we weren't allowed to.

Fear of punishment for not performing the role of student as it is acceptable within cultural settings, therefore, is a major reason as to why international students may remain silent in the classroom – to us, silence means performing the role of student correctly. To a large extent, this behavior and cultural approach to education and classroom etiquette stems from the large power distance that is created between students and instructors which is supposed to generate respect:

Participant 2:

Here being a student in the United States – it is so different. ... In Saudi Arabia professors think they are like angels so you don't discuss the problem with them – "Why do you come to me? You have to discuss this with your friends. Don't come to me!" – there is no office hours. Here, in U.S., you can just send an email and go to the professor and talk to them and show them your laptop and work. ...

Back home, if a teacher sees students talking in class he might just fire or kick them out of the university. It is very strict.

Participant 4:

In India it depends on the person. Most of them wouldn't do that. If they saw me coming with possible questions they would most likely be like "Just do what I told you to think. You are not supposed to ask me any questions." That way, in an education way, ... in India it is very different – I have to be very respectful, we cannot call them by their names but have to say "Sir" and at most we can say yes or no that's it.

Showing respect, by remaining silent in the classroom as a student, therefore, is a common behavior in many cultures outside of the U.S. This notion of respect impacts how international students may choose to participate within the U.S.-American classroom setting. The idea of engaging in discussion, and maybe even going so far as to challenge ideas of prominent scholars or the instructor, is something unfamiliar and daunting for many of us:

Participant 10:

Some of them are very - the classroom culture is totally different here than it is in China and here the professors they encourage you to talk but in China we are very conservative and we don't want to be like being aggressive or to challenge professors. So even sometimes when we know a professor might be wrong or we disagree with them we don't want to offend the professor.

Participant 14:

But I come from a culture where you really don't counter or challenge the professor. You know, if the professor says this is how it is then this is how it is.

... So in India silence is respect, silence is protocol, silence is just the accepted behavior of students in the classroom. So it means a lot of different things. Unless you directly get asked a question in the classroom you don't open your mouth.

Participant 5 added another indicator for cultural differences in terms of classroom etiquette and expectations – the difference in workload. In Germany, for example, we would get very few readings to prepare outside of class and most of the work and engagement with texts happened within the classroom space. In addition, exams and/or term paper were only scheduled in the last two weeks of every semester when classes were already over. When I first came to the U.S. as an international student I struggled a lot with the amount of readings that we had to do and the fact that we had to do several assignments throughout the semester, rather than just turning in one final paper at the end. Participant 5's narrative, therefore, was very relatable for me:

Participant 5:

All of the classes are very intense. And you will be required to be prepared a lot before class. That is very different from China because there I didn't have to prepare because there we just get into the room and be instructed by the teacher. So here it is a different way to learn something. So here before class you have to read a lot and be prepared. So before going to class and after class you have to do a lot of preparation. The classes here are more discussion-based and back home they are more lecture-based and what that means is that in China we are used to teacher-centered teaching approach but here students are required to get involved in the teaching activity so it is a student-centered class.

Being culturally conditioned within the German higher education system, all of these stories sounded very familiar to me. While verbal participation was encouraged in some of my classes in high school, during my Bachelor's education I learned that speaking up in class can result in public shaming, punishment, and sometimes even being kicked out of the classroom. The instructor, further, was positioned as the ultimate authority within the classroom and beyond which resulted in a very high power distance between student and teacher. Therefore, when I was interviewing my participants, one of the first points of connection was that we all seemed to understand the "correct" way to perform student in the classroom in a similar manner – quiet, obedient, polite, and paying attention. One thing many of my participants and I discussed, for instance, was how we would never dare to call one of our professors by his/her first name.

With this view of proper classroom etiquette of being silent in the classroom and accepting the authority of the instructor, it makes sense that culture is one of the main reasons identified by the participants as to why they remain silent in the U.S.-American classroom setting, a classroom setting that values discussion and speaking up and views silence as something negative. Therefore, I think it is important to examine how international students negotiate these conflicting approaches to pedagogical praxis. The following section, based on my second research question, provides insights into this dilemma.

## **RQ 2: How Do International Students Negotiate Voice and Silence in the U.S.-American Classroom Setting?**

During the analysis portion of my research, I identified three major themes in my participants' responses in regards to how they negotiate their struggles with voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting. Similar to the previous section, I decided to use said themes in order to structure my findings and present readers with a concise and accessible

overview of my findings. The major themes that international students identified as strategies and/or means to negotiate voice and silence in the classroom are (1) community-building, (2) assimilation, and (3) extra work.

### **Community-Building**

In my opinion, one of the most significant things when you uproot your entire life and move across the globe to a different country to get an advanced education is to find people you can connect with, exchange ideas with, and find support with. Building friendships and communities that achieve said goals is, therefore, imperative in order to stay grounded and connected. Furthermore, research has shown that, particularly in the educational setting, “building a sense of community results in greater (rather than less) productivity, leading to higher (rather than lower) academic achievement” (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008, p. 76). When negotiating feelings of being an outsider, the Other, and when negotiating our shifting identities, sense of belonging, and conceptualizations of voice and silence, community-building was the first, and arguably most important topic that international students talked about:

Participant 10:

When I struggled with the reading load I reached out to my peers in my department and asked them how they handled it because I couldn't read so much and so fast and they helped me a lot with some tips. And also the professors told me that if I have some problems with essays or writing assignments to come to office hour and we could solve it together. And they told me that they also struggled when they first come here. So they helped me a lot.

Participant 14:

I worked a lot with my cohort a lot and that helped me a lot. We would discuss materials together and brainstorm a lot and that really helped me to get through these moments where I maybe would have frozen up before.

As these two participants articulated, reaching out to and engaging in dialogue with people in the same learning community was very helpful. Oftentimes, we think that we may be the only ones who may be feeling overwhelmed, confused, and not understanding a certain concept. By reaching out and building a supportive learning community we may feel less isolated and a little less like the Other, a sentiment also addressed by participant 16:

Sometimes I thought that a certain issue happened because I am a non-native English speaker or because of a cultural difference but once I started reaching out to some of my classmates I learned that they were having the same issues and that it was not because I was an international student.

However, as much of the previous discussion on U.S.-centrism and exclusionary practices and behaviors has shown, many international students may be hesitant or may not feel comfortable reaching out to their U.S.-American classmates and/or faculty out of fear of being Othered even further. Therefore, many of the participants mentioned that they felt most comfortable creating communities with fellow international students:

Participant 1:

Some of my friends who are also international students helped me a lot because we shared many experiences with feeling like the Other, being exposed to stereotypes, and things like that.



Participant 9:

So I don't talk to a lot of U.S.-American classmates. I feel among international students we have things in common and share things. But American students are all focused on themselves I feel like.

Participant 11:

There were three other international students – two from India and one from Canada – but I feel my colleague from India was very helpful to me. I was the first Latin student but I think being international student brought us together because we shared a lot of experiences. ... It's a shared experience of being called an alien or an alien person.

Participant 17:

It wasn't hard for me to negotiate my identity when I was surrounded by international students but it is hard when I'm surrounded by U.S.-Americans. Because as international students we have a lot in common and I didn't even have to think about race. ... You know sharing my experiences with other people who look like me or other international students really helped a lot deal with my struggles as an international student.

Engaging with these narratives within the framework of community-building resonates with my own experience. Many times when I am among my fellow international students I feel that there are certain things that we don't have to verbalize – almost like one look or move is enough to communicate. While we might be from very different places and may have grown up under very different circumstances there are certain experiences that all international students have to go through, certain things that we all experience (e.g. immigration, exposure to U.S.-American

cultures, etc.), and that make it easier to connect with one another and form a supportive community built on our experiences. These communities provide us with comfort and create a space in which we don't feel like outsiders and/or the Other.

Some of the participants also spoke about how finding someone from one's home culture was very important and helpful to them. While there are many experiences that connect international students, finding someone from the same culture as one's own allows us to speak our native language and exchange shared experiences at a more nuanced and deeper level. This familiarity and connection can be very comforting when one is far away from home.

Participant 3:

As a Ph.D. student I have access to many resources, such as classmates and faculty members. For example, I have a faculty member in the department who is also from Japan and who I can talk to about the struggles he has gone through and how he negotiated them and I can learn from that.

Participant 4:

I think it gives a lot of comfort to international students when there are international and diverse faculty members. Because, for me, if I want to discuss something I would always go first to my one faculty member who is also Indian and not American. It makes it more comfortable because you know that they come from their own culture and they speak the same language so it makes it a lot easier to communicate with them. So it'll be much easier and especially new students seem to be more comfortable if they can find another person from the same culture.

Participant 12:

I speak a lot of Chinese here because there are a lot of Chinese people here and it's easier to get together and hang out. But it's very hard to make American friends and get to know them.

As is evident from these narratives when speaking about community-building as a means to negotiate our struggles and voice and silence in the classroom setting, most international students identified that to them, community signifies communities of fellow international students and/or international faculty, rather than U.S.-American classmates. As I mentioned before, I have always felt a different kind of connection with my international friends and with my U.S.-American friends – something my participants seemed to have experienced as well. That is not to say, of course, that my friendships with U.S.-Americans are any less genuine, but they definitely are different. I guess it is that shared frame of reference of being the Other within this system, of having had to go through the same steps with immigration, having had to take the same extensive tests to prove that you are indeed capable to function within an English-speaking environment, and that feeling of not needing to explain and educate people about the struggles of being an international student. Of course, we all have our unique experiences but at the same time we all share certain experiences with each other, experiences that can sometimes be communicated by a mere look and don't even have to be vocalized; shared experiences that can be communicated in and through silence. Therefore, community-building becomes an integral part of negotiating voice and silence within the U.S.-American educational system.

### **Assimilation**

Another strategy of negotiating voice and silence within the U.S.-American classroom setting was identified as assimilation – in my opinion a problematic strategy because arguably it

reinforces U.S.-American and West-centric approaches to education and classroom participation. Assimilation, as I use it here, is strongly connected to what Sue (2015) refers to as ethnocentric monoculturalism: “In many respects ethnocentric monoculturalism is about forced compliance and oppression directed toward people of color. They are asked to conform, change, assimilate, and acculturate to the norms and ways of the majority group or they will suffer the consequences” (p. 106). Many of my participants seemed to have felt a similar pressure to assimilate into the U.S.-American classroom setting:

Participant 1:

“In order to fit in you gotta let go of who you are and assimilate. And in this case assimilate into White, U.S.-American culture.”

Participant 3:

I feel this constant pressure to speak the way that they speak. And I know I’m here in the US and I am supposed to assimilate but many people don’t understand what it means going through this process. Especially if you are a graduate or Ph.D. student. ... I want to be performing the script they want me to perform, which is speaking up and sharing my thought. So I want to do that but I find it difficult to jump in. At the same time I feel pressured to speak up because of my classmates because they may not be as understanding as professors. ... No one has ever said anything to me but very often I feel like they don’t like the way I choose to participate by performing silence.

Participant 10:

I prefer to be more reserved and at first I’m so shy and feel so shy so I don’t want to talk too much in the classroom but our professor they encourage us to

contribute our opinion in the classroom so I said since this is America the starting culture here is very different so I have to accept their culture instead of bringing my own culture into the classroom. I prefer instead of bringing my culture into the classroom I should be more active in the classroom.

The participants here talked vividly of the pressure that they felt to assimilate into the U.S.-American culture and educational system. This need to fit in stems from not wanting to be positioned as the eternal Other who is different from the acceptable norm. In addition, some international students perceive their cultural differences as something that needs to be fixed:

Participant 2:

But I fixed it and I know how to deal with it. ... I think that compared to the other students who are citizens they can just study for a course or like an exam in one or two hours. But for me, I have to take sometimes four, five, six hours to study same materials because of the language. But once... I think it's not their problem, it's not the instructor's problem, it's just as an international student something I have to deal with. I have... when I came here I was pretty sure that I have to pay.... How do I say.... Must do more at first than other citizen students because of the language, because of different education, because of the culture sometimes.

Participant 7:

“I do embody silence. And I keep thinking of how I can change it and become more outspoken. I really hope that that is something I can change.”

Participant 14:

I didn't understand how to participate. I would just sit there and be like "I don't know if I should say anything." So it took me a while to get used to this new system. And now I enjoy it and I like this different type of learning.

The participants here looked at their silence in the classroom as a deficiency or a defect that they had to fix in order to fit in with the rest of their classroom communities. The notion of a defect or something being wrong, in my opinion, is inherent in the notion of assimilation. It's this idea of leaving the "damaged," "wrong" part of you behind and replacing it with what the dominant culture identifies as correct and acceptable behavior within a given context. Moreover, it also reinforces U.S.-centrism by rendering silence as incorrect or bad classroom behavior and something that must be rectified.

### **Extra Work**

The final strategy that was identified as a means to negotiate voice and silence within the U.S.-American classroom setting was the idea of having to assume extra work to prove that one is worthy to receive this education. While I don't want to argue here that U.S.-American students regard education as something to be taken for granted – which I know is not the case because (higher) education is still a very privileged space that not many U.S.-American citizens have access to due to their different positionalities within society that either allow or refuse them access to education – there seems to be an increased willingness or feeling of necessity among international students to "go the extra mile."

Participant 3:

But also reading and learning about people who have gone through similar things and talking about it openly. Finding dialogue. Finding multiple ways to look at

my struggles. ... So one thing I can do so people don't misunderstand my silence is to explain how silent is very different. But still when I do that often people say that here you are expected to do that [speak up in class].

Participant 7:

I just try to do whatever I can. ... I just set a lot of time aside to read and write and study. So I didn't really have a social life and people would joke "Oh, don't ask her out she won't come because she has to study." So yea, that's what I would do – study a lot.

Participant 10:

"So I feel very grateful that SIU and my department gave me the opportunity to study here so I figure that I need to do anything to grab it."

Participant 16:

"I studied harder, spend more time reading, writing, and listening."

One possible reason that international students may feel an increased pressure to perform well and, thus, assume extra work more willingly may have to do with the very strict immigration rules we have to adhere to:

The SEVIS Act<sup>10</sup>, which requires universities to closely monitor and track the enrollment credits and visas of international students, making it nearly impossible for international students to return home to visit family, and also regulating when

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<sup>10</sup> SEVIS is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System ... The SEVIS Act is tied to the U.S. legislation of the PATRIOT Act 1 and 2, legislation passed shortly after September 11, 2001 which erodes fundamental civil liberties of freedom of assembly, privacy of phone and communication, requirement of warrant prior to home search and seizure, and due process of public hearing and law. (Boler, 2004, p. xi)

and if international students can participate in research projects. (Boler, 2004, p.

ix)

Therefore, most students are aware that if their academic achievements are not up to par, their academic rights and immigration status may be revoked and they may have to return to their home countries. Since a degree from a U.S.-American and/or European institution is still held in high regard in many developing countries, international students may feel more pressured to work extra hard in order to fit in with and assimilate to the U.S.-American educational system. One of my classroom observations further underscored this point when I saw that one of the two international students in instructor 6's class had created and printed out extensive lecture notes in order to follow the instructor's lecture and at the same time he continued to take extensive notes throughout the entire class period.

A second aspect within the realm of having to put in extra work brings us back to the English language necessary to be a member of the classroom community:

Participant 4:

So the first time when I had to speak English, it was very fast so it took me a while to understand it and learn it. So I started to concentrate on each individual speaker first to get used to how they speak and once I got comfortable with that, I started watching movies and listening to music and got more comfortable with the English language. So that's how I negotiated the language barrier.

Participant 9:

I remember when I tried to participate in class and say my opinion that a lot of people looked like they didn't want to listen to me, they didn't care what I had to say. I think it's because I'm not that good at explaining my context because I



don't have the words to do so and then people struggle to understand me. So I need to do a lot of work so I can talk to people, I need to read a lot.

Working on their English language skills in order to be able to follow any given classroom discussion as well as being able to articulate one's own thoughts is another area where international students are required to do extra work.

Students, particularly those with years of 'classroom English' but little experience in really using the language, try to listen from the 'bottom up.' They attempt to piece the meaning together, word by word. It is difficult for us, as native and advanced non-native English users, to experience what students go through.

(Brown & Smith, 2007, p. viii)

International students, therefore, not only have to learn the content of any given class but at the same time have to negotiate learning a new language, a new culture, and a new educational system, all of which might be tremendously different from what they are accustomed to from their own home culture.

The major conclusions that we can draw from this chapter are that voice and silence are highly contextual, at times paradoxical, and culturally informed concepts that are practiced and understood differently based on an individual's multiple, intersecting positionalities. While international students appear to view voice as being able to speak and vocalize one's opinions, silence appears to be a far more complex matter. Silence, therefore, can be absence, presence, inclusion, exclusion, resistance, oppression, thoughtful, peaceful, communicative, and a form of engagement through active listening. Furthermore, international students have identified multiple causes and behaviors that either were identified as an act of silencing, necessitated self-censorship or self-silencing, or were informed by the students' race, gender, or a different

cultural understanding of what it means to perform student correctly in the classroom setting.

Finally, I discussed different ways and strategies of how voice and silence are negotiated within the classroom setting that included community-building, assimilation, and assuming extra work.

The overarching issue identified by the international students during our conversations was the exclusionary pedagogical praxis employed by many educators that is based on U.S.-centrism. In order to address and deconstruct this problematic issue further, the next chapter is solely dedicated to addressing pedagogical praxis within the U.S.-American educational system, in particular how it relates to our understanding of voice and silence within the classroom space.

## CHAPTER 6

### VOICE, SILENCE, AND PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS

The academic community is still ours to craft – and we have an obligation to craft it well.

– John T. Warren (2011)

While the previous chapter focused on how international students understand and negotiate voice and silence within the U.S.-American educational system, the purpose of this chapter is not only to center instructors' perceptions of voice and silence, but also to emphasize the importance of dialogue between international students and instructors. Dialogue between instructors and (international) students is important for several reasons: (1) because many of the participants mentioned that dialogue between instructors and students remains very rare; (2) because instructors and students both co-create a classroom community; and (3) because only through dialogue and through an intercultural exchange between predominantly White, U.S.-American instructors and international student participants can we move away from a West-centric approach to education and knowledge production that favors already privileged epistemologies and ways of knowing and understanding.

In order to make the plethora of collected data accessible to readers, I followed a similar structural pattern as in the previous chapter. I use research questions three and four to structure the two major sections of this chapter. The identified themes in the collected data from participant observations, instructor interviews, and international student interviews form subsections within this chapter. Therefore, the first section of this chapter addresses how instructors within the U.S.-American educational system understand and approach voice and silence pedagogically. The second section, then, offers a critical examination and discussion of

how we can move away from West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and towards the creation of more inclusive classroom spaces within the U.S.-American education system.

### **RQ 3: How Do Instructors Approach Voice and Silence in Their Pedagogical Practices Within the U.S.-American Academic Setting?**

As the previous discussions of meanings and understandings of voice and silence have demonstrated, voice and silence are two highly contextual and at times paradoxical concepts. In this section, the main focus lies on the instructors who participated in this project by being interviewed and allowing me to conduct several hours of field observations within their classrooms. However, as previously mentioned, I also wanted to create a space for dialogue between teachers and students in this chapter in particular because:

democratic dialogue is far more than an opportunity for the exchange of ideas, or gathering interesting information about other people's lives. It is an explicitly political event because it attempts to shift the usual flow of power in order to un-marginalize the marginalized. Voices that are usually marginalized – which is to say silenced – are to be centered and therefore empowered. (Boler, 2004, p. 59)

Thus, I start off with a brief discussion of the meanings of voice and silence – in general and as conceptualized within the U.S.-American classroom space – as they were articulated by the participating instructors. I, then, briefly elaborate on the different perceptions of international students and U.S.-American students as have been observed by the instructors and by myself during my fieldwork observations. I close this section by speaking to how the instructors understand and expanded the notion of classroom participation, as well as by taking a more critical look at some of the pedagogical practices employed by the instructors.

## Meanings of Voice

When I first started to take classes in the U.S., I quickly learned that the previous classroom etiquette that I had been socialized into was in contrast with what it was supposed to be here – as a student I was expected to move from silence to voice. As I have articulated many times throughout this project, “heavily influenced by Western understandings of communication practices, voice has traditionally been elevated as a privileged object of study” (Rowe & Malhotra, 2013, p. 3). And this rings true as most Western cultures prefer voice over silence, connect voice with agency, and regard it as a liberating praxis and as the positive end of the binary on which they position voice and silence. However, this research has shown that there is more to both concepts.

Instructor 2:

The concept of voice to me is like a body of lived experience and is culturally situated, materially situated. It is learned behaviors and depending on where you come from people understand voice differently. ... But voice to me is also feeling comfortable, feeling valued and realizing how interesting and benevolent everyone can feel if we create like a forum where everyone can contribute.

Student voice has been theorized extensively in the context of the U.S.-American classroom – in particular within research focusing on classroom participation. Luke and Gore (1992) argue that “student voice has been defined as the measures by which students and teacher participate in dialogue” (p. 106). Instructor 1 echoes this understanding of voice, defining it as “being able to speak your mind, share your thoughts and opinions.” However, the authors fail to theorize the potential of silence as a means to communicate and dialogue, and appear to hold on to a rather binaristic view of voice and silence – which, unfortunately, many instructors in U.S-centric

classrooms also appear to do. Some of my instructor participants, however, offered a more nuanced conceptualization of voice in the classroom space:

Instructor 3:

I think silence and voice are often set up in this false dichotomy in the classroom where you think one is good and one is bad. But it's a lot more complex and complicated than that. Voice is the most widely accepted form of participation in the classroom and the most visible form.

Instructor 6:

Pulling from scholars such as bell hooks and Linda Alcoff and many Black Feminist Thought scholars, I understand voice as space. So voice is not just the act of speaking. Voice as being willing to listen, you know in terms of participation.

In these more nuanced conceptualizations of voice within the classroom space, instructors seemed to understand voice and silence not only as relational, but at the same time also as different yet not mutually exclusive forms of participation in the classroom. However, as instructor 3 pointed out, voice still remains the most visible and widely accepted form of classroom participation. I expand on the topic of participation later on in this section but believe that it is important to keep in mind that within the classroom space, voice and silence are often viewed as a binary due to different levels of visibility they offer their participants. The following section elaborates on the conceptualizations of silence in the classroom more specifically.

### **Meanings of Silence**

The discussion on silence proved to be a lot more complex as the instructors negotiated the different ways in which they had observed and come to conceptualize the notion. Kalamaras

(1994) argues that “as an authentic mode of knowing, silence is not opposed to language, which I define as the human capacity for vocal and written utterance. Rather, silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge” (p. 8). In the context of the U.S.-American classroom setting, in particular, many scholars have focused on curriculum, and teacher education research has examined and provided strategies of how instructors can go about breaking the silences of students. However, much of that research fails to recognize the many different, contextual, and intersecting meanings of silence. “Educators ... need to inquire into silence as a source of pedagogical knowledge,” (Boler, 2004, p. 71) and recognize that “silence creates the classroom as an expansive space in which students can explore their own relationships with the course materials” (Rowe & Malhotra, 2013, p. 9). Many of the interviewed instructors articulated the complexity of silence within the classroom setting as they had experienced it:

Instructor 1:

It depends on the context. Sometimes silence is translation, processing time, reflection, comparison. You know, it’s an interior space that I can’t see a lot of times. So I respect that interior process. Sometimes it’s tiredness, sometimes it’s exhaustion, sometimes it’s disengagement, sometimes it’s disenfranchisement. Sometimes it’s “It doesn’t make sense this stupid model”, sometimes it’s “I didn’t do the readings”, sometimes it’s “Let’s just do an activity I don’t want to listen to a lecture.”

Instructor 3:

I think silence gets read in a lot of different ways and I think often silence in the classroom gets read as a discomfort with the classroom space. ... There are also

different types of silence – an engaged silence versus a disengaged silence. ...

Also thinking takes place in a moment of silence. Silence as thoughtful and thinking. I think we often forget that. Silence can work in many different ways in the classroom.

One of the instructors, in particular was very transparent about his previous misconceptions or, rather, limited interpretations of silence within the classroom setting:

Instructor 6:

So I don't view silence and voice on a binary. ... So yea, I don't view silence as a negative anymore – anymore. Early on I did. Oh yea, if you're not talking, you're not reading, you're not engaging, oh yeah. Very early on that's how I was doing it. Now, I read silence as a lot of things. You know, what kind of silence are we talking about? Are we talking about a contemplative silence, is the person engaging with silence because they're really working through what we are talking about? Is the person engaging in silence because they're really working through what's going on in their life right now. And their life is so stressful or a particular event was so stressful that they can't be present. ... You know, is there silence because they've been silenced? Is there silence because I've done something? ... Is it political silence? So yea, I wonder about certain students' silence but I think that silence is just so contextual for each individual student and it looks and feels different for each student.

One important notion that instructor 6 helps us to critically examine and deconstruct in his articulation of silence, I think, goes back to the idea of West-centric philosophies dominating most of our thought patterns and the way we understand our world and our surroundings.



This casting of silence by the West as a negative condition is largely erroneous.

When we examine Eastern mystical philosophy more closely, as well as particular meaning the practice of silence makes, we find a generative capacity to make meaning that is every bit as valuable as the meaning the practice of discourse yields. (Kalamaras, 1994, pp. 3-4)

However, I believe it is important to acknowledge that these cultural differences and misconceptions which tend to describe our world in binaries are still impacting us today and it is our job as educators – and I am speaking here of the many shapes and forms of educators that go beyond the academic and the classroom system – to challenge these preconceived, West-centric notions. One instructor spoke at length at how he believes our cultural background impacts how we understand the function of silence in the classroom setting:

Instructor 5:

I think it depends. If they are from an educational system where they have to be silent during the classroom time I assume that it is hard for them to break the silence. But I know in the U.S. educational system silence is not good. So I always remind them of the different meanings that silence can have depending on context, religion, culture... So I always try to bring resources too to help them understand. That way they can see that in the U.S. silence may mean one thing but the entire opposite in another country. ... So, I always try to have that conversation with all of my students too so that they can understand how different educational systems are in different countries. Silence is not good in the eyes of many U.S.-American students. But that is not the same everywhere. And silence can be good or bad depending on context.

While most of my conversations with the instructors left me hopeful that many of our current and future educators seem to understand and recognize the underlying complexities and different reasons for students' silence in the classroom, I also am aware that in many departments, colleges, and universities this mindset is not the norm and may even be discouraged by higher education institutions. As two instructors pointed out:

Instructor 2:

I hate it [silence]. I can't stand it. ... Silence for me it's probably a very privileged understanding that I have of it. ... Silence to me is problematic. And when it's in a classroom I typically want to know why. Is it because someone doesn't feel like they want to say or is it because they don't feel comfortable talking?

Instructor 1:

Grad students they understand that if they want a Ph.D. letter that they have to be somewhat more active, otherwise they are just sitting there silently. So in that sense, it doesn't serve them. But I think it's not that they are not good students, or they are not learning, or they are not attentive, because I know better. But I know that in some of my colleagues' ... in other departments they would perceive this [being silent in the classroom] as laziness or poor. So, a lot of people would perceive this just very incorrectly which the students aren't motivated or the students they just don't get it. So, that I find discouraging and sad, but it happens. That is one thing we talk about in CESL [Center for English as a Second Language] with our students, that you have to produce orally or you will be perceived as a weak student even though you might be thinking or listening or being mindful, this discourse community is very different.

Both instructors speak to the institutional problem within the West-centric, U.S.-American hegemonic educational system that values one particular kind of classroom participation over another. In addition, the reading of silence as “not showing appropriate interest in the course or ... not complet[ing] the reading assignment” (Howard, 2015, p. 67) or as them having failed to create a “safe” classroom space in which all students feel comfortable to engage in also seems to be a prominent yet limited perception. However, if we move away from a binaristic and negative view of silence in the classroom, we can create more inclusive spaces in which students can be themselves and we as educators can challenge our West-centric perceptions of correct classroom etiquette and the meanings of voice and silence. As Schultz (2009) argues, “paying attention to student silence as a form of participation opens up further possibilities for understanding individual students and classroom interactions” (p. 11) and “a focus on silence as a form of participation might lead a teacher to create a more democratic classroom that is inclusive of more students and multiple perspectives” (p. 13). Therefore, challenging our preconceived understandings and conceptualizations of voice and silence is one important step in allowing more students to feel like they are part of co-creating an inclusive classroom community. I expand on this discussion further in the section dedicated to Research Question 4, but do find it important to emphasize how all of these different ideas intersect and create a dialogue at this stage of the project.

### **Differences Between International and U.S.-American Students**

One of the main reasons why I chose to and/or wanted to include this particular section into this chapter was not to draw a distinction between international students and U.S.-American students. I don’t want to create yet another false dichotomy that would separate us further from each other when I hope to create more dialogue. But, after listening to the interviews again and

going through all of the transcribed interviews one thing that I found was that there were some common threads between the struggles that international students identified and the observations that the instructors shared with me. When I read both sets of transcriptions next to each other, I noted a sense of dialogue they were creating, a dialogue that reaffirmed experiences that the international students had gone through and shared with me and in which they – we – felt we were alone. The instructors I interviewed appeared to reaffirm the experiences and narratives the students shared. And while we don't need the reaffirmation of others to know that our experiences are valid, true, and authentic, this reaffirmation and acknowledgment at times can be very helpful – especially, I would argue, in moments when we may feel entirely isolated, alone, invisible, and unacknowledged in our struggles. So in this section, I would like to allow this reaffirmation to emerge because I believe that it can be healing and it can be a productive space in which we can start to engage in a dialogue across our differences.

In regard to general classroom behavior of international students, instructors shared the following observations and impressions:

Instructor 1:

But in a sense of preparation, and education, and what this means to them, they take this even more seriously than their U.S. counterparts because it's a two year opportunity that they want to maximize.

Instructor 7:

They usually do well. They are well prepared compared to a lot of U.S. high schools that just try their best .... So the international students who come here are usually very well prepared. They may have difficulty speaking or writing English but I know that they are always working on that.

These instructors' impressions are in line with the previous discussion on international students at times being more willing and eager to do the extra work because of visa regulations and of their general acknowledgement that being able to study overseas is a tremendous opportunity for many of them. In addition, in regards to "going the extra mile," instructor 6 shared the following observation:

Instructor 6:

I was realizing that it was my international students who were coming to my office hours, they were the ones who were emailing me with questions, they were the ones who were putting in effort, like I wasn't seeing before. They were never just expecting a certain grade, it was always like 'I want to do good for you, I need these things, I want to do well in this class.'

Research has shown that affirming students within the classroom and beyond aids in their feeling valued within the classroom space (Eyster & Martin, 2010; MacDonald & Sánchez-Casal, 2002; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). In addition, showing compassion and understanding can help students – especially those who are still getting used to a new cultural, linguistic, and educational system – to negotiate their struggles. In his approach to classroom participation, one instructor showed a lot of compassion for the specific needs of his students.

Instructor 5:

So, for example, I have a student from Kenya this semester and she said that she used to be silenced as a woman in education too and she is afraid of speaking up. So I asked her "What is a way that you want to participate? What is a way that you can participate?" and then she said "I can write, I can write an essay." And that is good for me, she can participate in that way. So far she has never spoken

up in the class when she is not giving a presentation. So maybe classmates don't know what's going on with her, but I know and understand why she doesn't speak up. So it's hard though because a lot of students in my class think that she is weird because she never speaks up but I tell them that there are many ways of learning and many ways of participating, there are many ways of communicating and speaking and I respect all of these diversities.

Therefore, opening up room for discussion and dialogue with students individually as to what participation means to them and how they feel comfortable embodying it could provide international students with more agency in shaping their classroom experience.

Reconceptualizing our understanding of classroom participation and allowing us to play a crucial role in this redefining process is the focus of the next section.

### **Classroom Participation**

As previously mentioned, there are many theories and understandings of what can and cannot be considered classroom participation. However, more recent scholarship has called for a more inclusive view of what participation might mean by complicating not only the concept of participation itself, but also by adding new concepts and approaches into the dialogue that might inspire an epistemological change. In particular, the notion of listening and/or active listening has acquired momentum in academic communities and is also one of the subsections included in this discussion on classroom participation. I start off with a more general discussion of how classroom participation is conceptualized and, then, dedicate a separate section to the concept of active listening as it relates to presence in the classroom.

**Conceptualizations of classroom participation.** The discussion in Chapter 5 showed that there are many different conceptualizations of what classroom participation looks like.

Depending on someone's field of study, cultural background, or previous experience with and/or exposure to different educational settings (e.g., home-schooling, service-learning-based classrooms), our understanding of what it means to perform student correctly may vary significantly. However, most of the students who participated in this project articulated that, generally speaking, participation within a U.S.-American classroom favors voice – or the vocalization of one's thoughts and opinions – over being silent – in its many different forms.

In classroom settings, it is common for teachers to devalue silences and promote speech making. Teachers often enlist “participation” as an evaluation criterion.

But, they do not recognize “silent active listening” as a legitimate form of participation. As teachers attend to students' speech making, they frequently fail to acknowledge the significance of the silent interactions between teachers and students that reveal human desires, interests, and power relationships.

Consequently, although teachers are able to compel students to engage in verbal participation in classroom settings, they are unlikely to hear and listen to students' inner voices that do not meet their expectations. (Boler, 2004, p. 82)

The only instructor who prescribed to this more “traditional” view on classroom participation was instructor 7 who said that to him, classroom participation means:

You would say something at least once in each class in response to the readings or the discussion. You would say something to the other students in class. You fully take part in the activities, such as one-on-one exercises.

Unfortunately, this limited conceptualization of classroom participation does not only increase the pressure on students to produce their thoughts vocally, but at the same time, “obscures the myriad ways that students might also participate through silence” (Schultz, 2009, p. 3). Some of

the other instructors who participated, on the other hand, have expanded their conceptualization of participation to be more attentive to their students' needs within the classroom space:

Instructor 1:

Preparation for class, preparing the readings in advance. Active participation means being involved in the small group activities. It doesn't anywhere say that you are expected to speak. But it is that you are to fully engage in the activities and to prepare any homework or materials in advance and to arrive in class on time. And missing a lot of classes would add to non-participation. So I say active in terms of small group communication but nowhere do I say you have to talk. I don't think that it is a reasonable expectation for a non-native speaker.

Instructor 2:

It takes a couple different forms. I've always allowed students who feel less comfortable talking to write down a comment and just turn in a piece of paper with it if they want to. I know not everyone is confident and talkative in class. Participation is showing up to class. It is when we are having discussions to have done the readings and to participate and if you're not comfortable openly and verbally participating then I recommend you write something down and if it is something you wanted to introduce to the class but you didn't necessarily feel comfortable saying it then you can tell me to bring it up either anonymously or with mentioning my name.

Instructor 6:

I will say it's changed from when I first started teaching. But now, classroom participation looks like a lot of different things. It looks to me... it's not just about



speaking. It's taking notes, it's giving the appearance of active engagement... it's not just that ... there is a big difference in facial features for someone who is paying attention, someone who is listening to you and being somewhere else mentally or emotionally. So participation is very much that active engagement nonverbally – do I see that you're following me, do I see that you're thinking, or do I see you on your phone? For international students who have asked me if they can use their phone to translate – their phone in their hand means something fundamentally different than my U.S.-American students' phones in their hands. So that to me is still participation. Participation is also emailing me, talking to me after class, office hours, it is turning work in.

Not only do these instructors acknowledge that there is more to classroom participation than mere speaking up in class, they further offer students different avenues of participation should they feel in any way uncomfortable about verbalizing their thoughts in class. Therefore, non-verbal communication, body language, reaching out to professors, and writing down answers instead of verbalizing them are identified as some ways of how students who prefer to remain silent in class can still participate. In addition, while I appreciate the mindful, constructive, and progressive ways in which instructors chose to expand their definition and conceptualization of classroom participation, the most compassionate and student-centered approach, in my opinion, was offered by instructor 5. He explains:

It [classroom participation] means ambiguous. Because in this globalized world you can meet students from so many parts of the world and they are taught in so many different ways. Right now, I have students from Venezuela and Saudi Arabia in my class and their understanding of what correct classroom

participation and behavior looks like is very different from each other, from my own, and from the American understanding. And I want to recognize that. I want to take that diversity seriously. So what I do is, I don't expect anyone to behave in a certain way. But I always say at the beginning of the class that I want them to participate as much as they can in their own way. So in the past few years and semesters I've had so many Asian students and they almost never said anything, and I can understand why. So I had a conversation with them after class and they talk a lot. ... Silent in class and at the end you submit a killer paper – that's how they were taught to be good students. If they spoke up at home they probably got something like "Why do you speak up? Don't speak up! We want to finish class on time! So don't ask questions!" So yea, the meaning of classroom participation is ambiguous to me because everyone has a different view on it. So, I believe that we should diversify the meaning of participating. If you think that speaking up in class is appropriate and that's how you were brought up it's alright and if you don't feel comfortable with that it's alright as well. If you were taught to be silent or be listening-focused if that feels right for you, you can go with that, if you hate that you can just change it. But don't feel bad just because you're different.

Because I have many Asian students in particular who say to me "I know I don't speak a lot so I worry about my participation points." But you don't have to worry about it in my class I tell them and they usually are surprised because they are now in the U.S. and in the U.S. educational system this is good student behavior and this is bad but that doesn't mean that it is bad in every single country.

Instructor 5 shared that he does take the initiative and invites every one of his students to meet with him – if they desire to do so – and talk about what classroom participation means to them, the individual student. Students, in his class, are allowed to define and choose classroom participation for themselves and he forms a “contract” with the students in which they agree upon what participation for the semester will look like. Acknowledging that classroom participation has multiple meanings and also allowing students to take agency over the way they learn best, is a very progressive approach. In my personal opinion, this approach to classroom participation in which students are allowed to be their own agents, is a beautiful way to include the multiple positionalities, epistemologies, and levels of comfort that students bring with them. Furthermore, I believe that this approach is very humanizing as it allows students to take charge of their education and perform their identities in the many different ways they choose to.

**Active listening and presence in the classroom.** In Chapter 2, I already spoke a little bit about the notion of active listening as a means to understand how silence functions as a way to participate in class. In addition, instructors in the previous section also emphasized that as long as their students appeared to be engaged with the classroom discussion – including through silence – and paid attention they considered this behavior as participation. In this section, I would like to unpack this notion of “being present,” “being engaged,” and “active listening” a little further.

Empathic listening can even be considered to be a philosophy of communicating, of responding, in that such listening implies a fuller personhood, a healthy view of otherness and self, as well as a guide to living and loving more fully. Empathic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be. Empathic

listening is to be open to the world and others as unique and separate realities.

(Wolvin & Coakley, 1993, pp. 194-195)

But, one may wonder, how this type of listening – this active, engaged, empathic listening – is performed in the classroom.

Instructor 5:

But most of my students from Asia they say that listening is participation and writing. So I always see them participating when they listen. How can I make sure that they listen? I always ask them after the class if they got their point and if they have an opinion about that – so it's like a one-on-one check-in style.

Participant 15:

If I don't "participate" in class meaning if I don't actively listen in class then I don't learn or remember and have to do double the work. So you know, listen and take notes and then you can remember a good portion of it.

Autoethnographic reflection:

"Von der Hand in den Verstand!" I remember this phrase every time I think of classroom participation and note-taking. It loosely translates into "From the hand into the mind." Throughout my entire "career" as a student – and it has been a journey of over 20 years at this point – I have always been an avid note-taker. Learning, listening, reflecting, and taking notes have always gone hand-in-hand for me. When I first started my Master's program, I sat in class quietly, with my reading assignments colorfully highlighted and notes in the margins. I would sit in class and be silent, but I was so very engaged. I was listening. I was observing. I was reflecting. And I was taking notes. In a 50-minute class period I would

probably take at least 3-5 pages of notes – more if the discussion that day was extremely engaging. I would go home after class, read through my notes, and I would start to understand. Comprehension happens for me in those reflective moments after class in which I revisit my notes. I still take notes today. I probably write down something every day. I guess it is part of who I am, how I learn, and how I come to reflect, engage with, and understand the world around me. I am silent in almost all of these reflective moments. Reflection and comprehension take place for me in my silence. My silence is engaged. My silence is active listening, processing, reflecting, and comprehending.

To me, listening is sometimes even harder than talking because it is a much more engaged process. Nash (2014) argues that:

Listening is often the key to understanding, yet educators have little or no training in how to listen. Listening ... requires thinking, not just hearing. ... Listening includes supportive body language and periods of silence so everyone can arrange his or her thoughts. (p. 22)

Listening, hence, similar to silence, is a very complex and engaged process. In actively listening we can create a communicative space in which the voices and silences of people are equally important and valued. In addition, “our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice,” (hooks, 1994, p. 84) and can aid in building and fostering communities built on respect and inclusion of the multiple realities and perspectives of different people in their multiple localities. At the same time, however, I don’t wish to diminish the value of voice because voice is something very precious as well. But I think what I want to take away from this discussion, in particular, is that we must be mindful in how we engage with voice and

silence within different classroom spaces. In my opinion, silencing a student can be as traumatizing as forcing students to voice their opinions (e.g., through cold-calling). My fourth and final research question, hence, looks at how we can create these more inclusive classroom environments that move away from West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and allow for the inclusion of multiple realities and epistemologies.

#### **RQ 4: How Can We Reconceptualize West-Centric Notions of Voice and Silence in Academia and in Pedagogical Settings?**

The goal of this final section is to bring into dialogue the voices of the international students and the instructors who volunteered to participate in my research. In doing so, I hope to create a communicative space in which we can not only address ways in which we can make the classroom space more inclusive, but at the same time expand our understanding and appreciation of voice and silence and how they function within the U.S.-American educational setting. When talking about this question, in particular, I was pleasantly surprised that almost every single one of the international students and instructors seemed to agree on the major issues that we need to address in order to make our classrooms more inclusive spaces. The identified themes in my data, which I elaborate on in this section, are (1) difference and diversity, (2) cultural sensitivity, and (3) community-building.

#### **Difference and Diversity**

Several aspects regarding difference and diversity identified by the research participants are grouped together in this section. Firstly, participants called for more understanding when encountering difference. Secondly, participants point out that we also need more appreciation of difference and diversity students bring to class with them. And finally, participants emphasized that in order for real change to happen and for classrooms and academia to become more

understanding, appreciative, and inclusive of difference and diversity, we need to expand our current curriculum.

**Understanding.** When international students first enter the U.S.-American classroom many feel as if they are positioned as the Other within a system that privileges certain identities, positionalities, and voices over others.

Participant 14:

People also need to realize that international students come from entirely different systems and sometimes feel shy to ask questions because they don't want to look like an idiot. And it could be small things like formatting a paper. When I did my Master's degree in India I had to handwrite all of my papers. Here everything is computer-generated. It may seem "normal" for American students but it is not a given for every single student. And professors should try to be more aware of these things.

Therefore, even small things such as formatting a paper correctly can become hurdles for international students. While some may argue that this is only a small issue, for some this might be enough to feel discouraged; after all, if I cannot even correctly format a paper then how am I to negotiate the bigger issues I still might face?!

Instructor 1:

This notion of everybody has expertise. ... Establish that everybody is a knower and has interesting knowledge to share. ... My battle is to try to dismantle this assumption that native speakers are more knowledgeable. Because I think that this assumption builds silence. And a lot of international students come in thinking

that native speakers have more knowledge or expertise than them because of their native English skills. But that's not the case.

Participant 8:

Being able to understand people's differences, being able to understand that people have their fears because they are coming from other countries and maybe that's the first time that they're in a classroom dealing with other people that is not from their culture. So it's kind of scary. I may not feel that way but I can understand that some people feel that way especially if their English is not as good or strong.

Here, both participants also speak to a similar issue – the idea of English hegemony and how it has created a West- and English-centric epistemological canon that includes certain ways of knowing and knowledge production while at the same time excluding others. As Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) argue:

The institutionalization of the Western canon (and its related epistemology) was made even stronger by the most recent emphasis on standardized assessments as the form of accountability [...which ] further institutionalizes the Western canon and a Euro-centric curriculum since what is tested is what is taught. (p. 104)

This, then, also goes back to the previous discussion of international students feeling silenced and excluded from discourse because what is valued and taught is U.S.-centric materials which exclude the experiences of international students. Therefore, the call for more understanding of difference and diversity and how they function within the U.S.-American classroom setting is a first step to create a more inclusive learning environment.



**Appreciation.** Participants further called for more appreciation and celebration of culturally diverse epistemologies and ways of knowing and learning within the U.S.-American educational system as a whole. In their articulations of a need for more appreciation of diversity, participants emphasized the idea of people needing to better learn how to listen to the narratives and experiences that may counter their own.

Participant 3:

I want to create a space where people in the classroom space can be understandable and open to the differences that people from different background bring in. ... But I want to create space where we can see a thing multiple ways not just from the way we were taught to see. Silence, for instance, many people say is bad behavior in the classroom but some people may say no but I always try to encourage different ways of looking at it.

Instructor 2:

But I love having international students and having them share their experiences with us and especially also things that they find weird about U.S. culture. Because one of the things that I think is very important to get across is cognitive dissonance and how we all have our body of experience and see and understand things differently. And that's what I really want to get across to all of my students, is a greater understanding and respect for difference.

Participant 11:

I think if I could have had this moment with the instructor it could've been really helpful for me in the classroom. ... I am trying to think of ways of how we could increase cultural appreciation and appreciation of diversity and different cultural

backgrounds. You know I think it's so important to create environments where you can appreciate cultural diversity.

Instructor 4:

And I love the variety that they add to the classroom in the sense of classroom discussion and the different views and opinions that they contribute. So students from other countries can add other viewpoints and opinions. It adds a different aspect to the classroom. I love it when some of my others students then ask questions and there is this exchange.

Therefore, creating spaces in which students and instructors can have engaged conversations in which we can learn from each other by actively and empathically listening to each other's experiences and narratives is imperative.

Hearing involves more than "listening" to the counterstories. It encompasses developing an understanding and appreciation of them, recognizing their legitimacy and validity in a place where White Eurocentric norms have historically been the standard, and ensuring these stories are given their due in knowledge mobilization efforts to interrupt the socially constructed normative order of being. (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 86)

Therefore, what is emphasized here, is that the main purpose is not to counter silence U.S.-American students but to create spaces in which different epistemologies can be shared if the students choose to do so and to encourage commitment within the classroom community to actively listen to one another in these moments. Walter Mignolo refers to this praxis as the 'decolonial option' in which "Western thought is not destroyed but rather decentered – it becomes a possibility among others and is forced to confront its historical and global

situatedness, its geopositionality, which it has systematically denied” (Mignolo as cited in Lissovoy, 2015, p. 121). In order to achieve this goal, however, some of the participants argued that what is needed is a reformation and/or expansion of the current curriculum.

**Curriculum change/expansion.** In order to create spaces in which marginalized voices, epistemologies, and ways of knowing and knowledge production can be centered, participants argue that the curriculum itself must be changed.

In the process of delinking, the West’s flattened and hierarchical geography of reason is rejected in favor of a border thinking that is sensitive to epistemological diversity and recognizes the coevalness of different ways of knowing and being – as opposed to positioning Eurocentric thought at the apex of history and culture and assigning it a putative universality that is used to disparage and sideline other epistemologies. (Lissovoy, 2015, pp. 120-121)

The Euro- and U.S.-centric epistemologies that currently form almost our entire academic system must be de-centered in order to create space for international students and other peripheral epistemologies to be included into our teaching and learning.

Participant 17:

I think it all starts with the curriculum – I don’t really know what they learn, even in high school, I don’t know. Because even here when you ask questions, their geography is not good, you ask them where is Iran and they don’t know. People tell me that Congo is in Latin America and it sounds small but I think this is really important and where it all starts. So if you learn only about your culture and you don’t learn about others from an early age, that’s problematic. ... They should have more classes on intercultural communication. This is not something you

should only take when you just start college, you can start with those classes earlier because the US is such a culturally diverse space, it's a space where I have met people from all around the globe. So with that much diversity, that should be part of the curriculum and I think classes such as intercultural communication should be mandatory. Of course they also have to educate themselves and teachers have to address these issues. They need some type of conscious-raising because they're not even aware of that. Some of them don't even know and take it for granted. They are not aware of their privilege and they need to be taught.

Instructor 6:

I would make a class about communicating across difference mandatory at every university. I think given the context of globalization, how poorly we talk about difference, how poorly we understand difference, I think if this world is ever gonna have a chance I think we need to learn how to talk about our discomfort, I think we need to learn how to be wrong, I think we need to get our opinions checked. So many opinions in this world are found on things like how we grow up and we don't challenge those things, we don't reflect on them, and that we are just so bad at discourse at the global, the national, the local, the institutional levels, we are so bad at talking about differences in general that we should just have a common course of how to communicate across and with difference. ... I think this engagement with difference begins with language.

Participant 1:

I would design a course on cultural sensitivity. ... Also I would make sure to open the first day of class up to talk about, not cultural differences so much, but

cultural sensitivity, you know, and talk about how we become aware of certain cultures. Because what is okay to do in your own culture is not necessarily okay for me, even among international students. ... But many of us don't get the opportunity to talk about our culture. And I think if we could have these conversations at every beginning of a class, each semester and talk about intercultural sensitivity. And of course, expand that to the faculty level. And that way we can challenge stereotypes as well.

Through the process of de-centering exclusionary, U.S.- and West-centric educational systems we can not only create more inclusive learning spaces that value different ways of knowing, teaching, and learning, but students may also develop a new sense of belonging (Malhotra & Rowe, 2013). In addition to a sense of belonging, I think that through this process of de-centering international students may also feel like their stories, bodies, and lives matter and that people are willing to engage in different forms of dialogue – through voice and/or silence – in which we feel like we are being heard.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

In addition to increased awareness, appreciation, understanding, and inclusion of difference and diversity into the U.S.-American classroom setting, participants also called for more cultural sensitivity in order to create more inclusive spaces in which students can practice voice and silence. While cultural sensitivity may seem very closely related to the previous section on difference and diversity – and I am not arguing that they are not closely related – the codes that emerged in this section are slightly different. The themes I discuss in this section are (1) accommodation and (2) agency in participation.

**Accommodation.** This point strongly relates back to the notion of assimilation that was discussed in Chapter 5 where international students shared that one strategy to negotiate voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom is (forced) assimilation. Here, however, the participants are talking back and challenging the idea that the burden to change their identities and ways of being and functioning in the classroom lies solely on the shoulders of international students.

Participant 17:

I would ask American students to accommodate to international students. I think it is only our responsibility as international students to adjust to the American culture, to cope with the cultural background, to adjust our accent, to change our culture because we are not in a position of power. So if I don't do it, I'm not going to succeed. But I don't see many American students make a similar effort, I don't think they're considerate, and I don't see them trying to learn about another culture. I often get that in the classroom that students say that they are having a hard time adjusting to my accent but what they don't realize is that it's a two-way street and I am doing the same thing. They also have to adjust. Because when they go to other countries they are still in a position of power and are treated that way so I don't know how they cannot even try. When you are in the classroom acknowledge your privilege as a white, U.S.-American student, and an English native speaker. Try to think of other people. And I have seen people do a really good job with that but others don't care.

Instructor 6:

Sometimes for instance when I also learn where folks are from, like on the first day of class, I ask them where home is – however they interpret that. So whenever I find out from them where home is and it is a culture I’m not too familiar with or a particular nation state that I don’t bring examples in from that region I do some current events research from that culture or area to bring those in as well.

Participant 10:

But in my classroom I feel like I’m the minority group we just have several international students over there how can we expect professors to slow down and not use much euphemism sayings that only students with American background understand how can we expect the professor to sacrifice the benefits to American students in order to cater to our demands. So that’s what I thought. I feel like if professors could be more aware of those differences and consider our thoughts inside but sometimes when we talk about history and the professor will make joke of other cultures and I know that students are sometimes not comfortable with that. But I feel like if you could consider our differences that would be much better and could create a more inclusive culture in the classroom.

The participants, here, call out the “strong belief in the superiority of White Euro-American cultural heritage” (Sue, 2015, p. 100) that many U.S.-Americans hold dear and that has been globally enabled by the history of colonization by Europe of the “rest of the world.” In addition to colonization in which White Europeans imposed their beliefs, culture, and values on people they deemed less human and civilized than themselves, the participants’ argument also evokes the concept of White supremacy. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) argue that:

Curriculum reinforces the hierarchical status-quo of white supremacy and renders the race and cultures of non-whites inferior. The constant bombardment of messages embedded in curriculum about the superiority of whites and inferiority of non-whites (which can be explicit or implicit) can indoctrinate students about their placement of the racial hierarchy in relation to their race. This can contribute to internalized racism and potentially damage the self-concept of non-white students. (p. 102)

Participant 13 also speaks to this by stating that “I don’t know how to change people and a system that think is superior.” However, I believe that the calls of the participants for increased awareness and inclusion of diversity and cultural sensitivity, as well as the ideas and strategies that they decided to share with me for this project are good indicators that there remains hope that eventually, and by taking it one step at a time, we may be able to change the system and allow marginalized and international students to have more agency in their learning.

**Agency in participation.** While I have already discussed the significance of reconceptualizing classroom participation and the ways students are allowed to embody and perform different types of participation, my research participants also identified it as an important way in moving away from West-centric ways of understanding voice and silence.

Instructor 5:

Unless students ask me for ways of how they can get more comfortable with speaking up in the classroom of course I will help. But if they don’t come to me and are comfortable with being silent that is okay with me.



## Participant 7:

I think I would change the instructor's attitude and the attitudes amongst classmates. Don't expect everyone to speak up in order to participate and don't think that only those who speak up are the ones doing the work. ... Just don't have that set expectation of privileging the ones speaking up and privileging the act or performance of speaking up. Then maybe we can create a more inclusive classroom and for the silent ones they can choose different ways to show their voices and to participate. ... Allowing students to perform what they think participation is: allow the silent ones to take notes, if they want to talk let them talk, if they want to be silent let them be silent. Or students can talk to the teacher after class. I mean, everybody has their own level of comfortness. But talk to the students about the agency of choosing to speak or not, but we should not only value the ones who have spoken up.

## Instructor 1:

This idea that we always have to dialogue again that's Western, right?! The idea that we always have to go like "boom boom boom boom boom." And some students don't need that or don't want that. So, but, instructors are uncomfortable with silence.

Similar to my previous argument of having to reconceptualize our understanding of classroom participation and calling for the de-centering of West-/Euro-/U.S.-centric means of instruction and understandings of voice and silence, the participants emphasize that allowing students the agency to determine how they learn best may be what students need in order to feel valued and included in their learning environment. Furthermore, I still hold strong to my belief that allowing

students agency in defining classroom participation for themselves and based on their individual needs, is a humanizing pedagogical praxis that can be used to challenge the system that placed the same students at the periphery in the first place.

### **Community-Building**

The final main theme that was identified in my data as a means to create more inclusive classroom spaces that allow for a reconceptualization of voice and silence is community-building. International students already identified that one of their main strategies to negotiate voice and silence is to build supportive learning communities in which they feel valued and are able to freely choose to perform silence or voice without the fear of being judged or scolded. It comes as no surprise then that my participants also identified community-building as a means to move away from and challenge West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence.

Participant 8:

I sometimes feel like in some of the classes I took that they kind of ignore you when you're international student and sometimes it's like you're feeling alone. Because you don't have anybody and you feel like they don't like me. They don't want to be in the same group as me because I'm not good. So I think we need to change that thinking and students should not discriminate against international students. Because you feel that and then you try to blend in but nobody wants to accept you.

Instructor 7:

It seems like the American students don't reach out as much to the international students. They don't really interact a whole lot. Possibly because they don't know

what to talk about or don't know what to say or they may think that the international students don't understand.

I think that much of what these two participants shared resonates with the feelings of invisibility and not being included that international students articulated in the previous chapter. International students are situated as the Other who U.S.-American students mostly cannot relate to. However, as participant 8 pointed out, this limited view creates an unwelcoming learning environment - not just for international students, but for all students – and is something we need to work on mitigating. Community-building, therefore, becomes even more important:

Participant 14:

I think it is important that when you discuss something in a classroom that you feel comfortable – and when you know who the people in your classroom are then that will make people more comfortable around each other. I think getting to know each other is very important. Sometimes you're in a class with people for weeks and you still don't need their names or who they are. There is no sort of communal feeling.

Instructor 1:

I try to get my groups so that you are with people you haven't worked with before, and this idea that do a lot of that in the beginning so they get to know each other. And I also allow them to talk a little bit personally in the beginning so that they can kind of team-build. Because I feel like once they see each other as people, they start to share anecdotes, you see gradual community-building. So

yea, it is very possible to build a discourse community that doesn't necessarily force voice or encourage silence but allows space for both.

While some may think that small group activities and/or icebreakers in the end are simply a means to break the silence, I think that I agree with instructor 1's argument that we can and must still create spaces that allow for both voice and silence at the same time. After all, I believe that communication and dialogue inherently is a space where voice and silence meet and interact with each other. "Dialogue is two-way, interactive visiting. Dialogue involves periods of lots of noise as people share and lots of silence as people muse. Dialogue is communication that creates and recreates multiple understandings" (Wink, 2011, p. 65). I, therefore, believe that in trying to find more ways that allow students to build learning communities within their given classroom settings through dialogue which is built on voice, silence, and active, empathetic, and reflexive listening we must not only move away from West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence, but at the same time we must learn to appreciate how voice and silence can dialogically function within a space at the same time in a productive way.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In der vollkommenen Stille hört man die ganze Welt<sup>11</sup>. – Kurt Tucholsky (in Kewes, 2012)

Going into this research project, I thought that by the end I would have it “all figured out,” and if asked I could tell people exactly what voice and silence mean and how we can understand them. Yet, this seems so paradoxical to me right now because the goal of this project was never to fix voice and silence in their meaning but to gain a better understanding of how we can conceptualize these two concepts in different contexts, particularly within the classroom setting. I suppose it is here that the Western European need to define, dichotomize, and fix meanings still rings through in me. However, now that I am writing this concluding chapter and thinking back at the many engaging, sad, heartfelt, painful, tough, exhausting, yet hopeful conversations I had with my international student participants and instructors, I think that not only have I learned a lot through engaging in this research but at the same time I feel like I have grown, grown in the sense that I feel comfortable enough to say that I don’t know what voice and silence mean on the larger spectrum. And by that, I mean that I have come to acknowledge that both of these concepts are so inherently contextual, paradoxical, fluid, complex, and dialogic that attempting to provide a definition for either would be highly problematic. Defining, and thereby fixing the meaning of such complex concepts such as voice and silence is problematic because it would take away from the fluidity and the paradox of how these concepts are intertwined. In addition, I would argue that the attempt to define the meaning of voice and silence has lead to the

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<sup>11</sup> Translation: In complete silence one hears the entire world.

mainstream (i.e., White, Western) (mis)conception of conceptualizing voice and silence as binaristic.

I am also thinking back to all of the moments that inspired and/or motivated me to conduct this research. I think back to my own experiences of negotiating voice and silence as an international student in predominantly discussion-based classrooms. I also remember the plethora of internal monologues I engaged in when trying to convince myself to “perform student correctly” (as by U.S.-American standards) and to speak up in class. I have always been a very strict judge of my own performances and remember the many unkind things I thought about myself whenever I failed to perform student correctly and contribute something to the classroom discussion. But more than thinking of myself as a failure, it was the thought of my instructors and classmates – international and U.S.-American – thinking of me as a failure and questioning my being admitted to a graduate program that worried me. These internal struggles in my own negotiation of voice and silence and the ways in which I embodied and performed them in the U.S.-American classroom spaces that were so hard on me in the beginning, turned out to be a connector between me and many of my international student participants in this research, who recounted similar experiences.

Another commonality I found with many of the international students was that we didn’t know and/or had never experienced kindness and/or empathy from any of our instructors in our home culture. When I think back to the many moments in which I felt like a failure and didn’t deserve to be in a graduate program because I failed to speak up in class, I don’t remember my instructors ever being unkind or making me feel bad about it. It was I who was unkind to myself. Much of this may have also had to do with the fact that my silence in a space dominated by voice positioned me as the Other who didn’t fit and belong – a feeling that my many privileges had

always guarded me from up until this moment. As I articulated in Chapter 1, it wasn't until much later, and after I had started to embrace my identity as an international student as well as my hybrid cultural identity, that I felt comfortable to move from silence to voice. However, that is not to say that I don't see the value of silent reflection and the space it opens for active and engaged listening. Rather, I have come to a point where I feel comfortable moving on the continuum that is formed by voice and silence and I have come to appreciate voice and silence as intertwined communicative acts.

In this dissertation, I first introduced my motivation and rationale for this research. I wanted to move away from the binaristic view of voice and silence that much of Western thought has created. Therefore, I revisited a lot of literature on global philosophy to develop a more nuanced approach to the deconstruction of the voice-silence dichotomy. Pulling from scholars such as Kalamaras (1994), Li (2001), and Rowe and Malhotra (2013), I built the argument that voice and silence are not in binary opposition but rather form a continuum and can both be conceptualized as communicative acts. Furthermore, I selected postcolonial theory as my main anchor for this research because it helps us move away from West-centric approaches to conceptualizing and understanding diverse epistemologies and populations (such as international students). In addition, since one of my main goals for this research was to create a space in which international students could share their narratives and get their voices heard, postcolonial theory allowed me to frame this project in a way that I was able to move these subaltern epistemologies to the center while critically engaging with and deconstructing the West-centric conceptualizations of voice, silence, and classroom participation. In addition, I used the meta discourses of critical (communication) pedagogy and international student-centered research in order to develop a theoretical and epistemological dialogue which allowed me to enhance the

limited theorization of voice and silence within the three meta discourses separately. I focused on the four themes of (1) understanding multiple conceptualizations of voice, silence, and agency, (2) re-conceptualizing classroom participation, (3) inclusion of multiple lived experiences, and (4) community-building in order to make a case for a dialogic approach between the three selected meta discourses. These four themes were instrumental in the creation of my four research questions that framed this project (I review these again in the next section).

As my research method I attempted to use critical complete-member ethnography (CCME) as a means to approach and analyze my data (however, as I mention in the following section, there were several limitations to my methodology). I made the argument that rather than restricting CCME to intracultural communication research we should expand it to a method of inquiry into intercultural communication as well. I used one of the key commitments of CCME – epistemological intimacy – and research focusing on hybrid and between identities in order to make this case. I further elaborated on this in my own discussion of my between researcher identity and its impact on this project. The fluid and dialectic conceptualization of membership that I argued for is very much in line with the conception of voice and silence as dialogic and ever-changing. In this final chapter, I briefly review the findings of this project by focusing in particular on the theoretical and practical (i.e., pedagogical) implications of this research. In addition, I address the limitations and future directions of research within the realm of voice, silence, classroom participation, and international student education.

### **Review of Findings**

Providing a condensed overview of my findings may be one of the hardest tasks because of the in-depth nature as well as the amount of data in this project. However, I want to briefly review my findings in order to synthesize them for the closing of this project. I start off by



briefly reviewing my four research questions for this dissertation and providing a concise overview of my findings for each of them. Then, I address the theoretical implications of this research, followed by the pedagogical implications. However, I am not arguing that the two – theory and pedagogy – should be strictly separated from each other but rather they are the two sides that form the coin that is this research project.

### **Review of Data Analysis**

As previously mentioned, I would like to revisit the four research questions that guided this research in this section in order to provide readers with a concise view of my findings, as well as an opportunity to synthesize the large amount of data presented in Chapters 5 and 6. My first research question addressed how international students in the U.S. conceptualize voice and silence in general, as well as in the classroom space. My international student participants understood voice as a means to express oneself. This is connected to the idea of being heard. The participants, therefore, early on in the interviews addressed the question of who is listening to our narratives, something I elaborate on again shortly. In the classroom space, voice was understood as creating a space in which international students could share their experiences and different knowledges while creating a dialogue among classmates. Importantly, also, none of the participants seemed to view voice and silence as polar opposites but conceptualized them as different forms of communication, as well as related and connected to each other. The participants helped me unpack the many different ways that silence can be understood, as well as its complex and contextual nature. In our discussion on why my international student participants chose to remain silent in the U.S.-American classroom, we engaged in many difficult and, at times, painful conversations. Derived from the shared narratives of my student participants, I found five prominent themes regarding the causes of international student silences within the

U.S.-American classroom setting: (1) invisibility and self-censorship, (2) being Othered and being silenced, (3) language, (4) race and gender, and (5) culture. Many international students argued that they choose to remain silent in their U.S.-American classrooms because they feel that their experiences and epistemologies do not matter. They feel that U.S.-Americans don't want to listen to them, and feel invisible and/or excluded in the classroom where there is little or no space for them to voice their thoughts. Much of the discussion focused on how the predominance of U.S.-centrism in many of the classes creates an environment in which international students don't feel safe, comfortable, or welcome to share their narratives and diverse epistemologies. In addition to choosing to remain silent or self-censoring themselves, the international students also shared that at times they feel actively silenced and/or Othered by their classroom community. Students recounted memories of their experiences and ideas being actively shut down, and their differences being called out in dehumanizing ways. Furthermore, linguistic, racial, gender, and cultural differences were identified as additional markers of the international students' Otherness that renders them silent within the U.S.-American classroom setting. The monocultural approach to education that the students called out in these narratives was a common thread connecting many of their experiences. According to them, U.S.-centric ways of knowing and knowledge production are highlighted and celebrated in the classes, while narratives or experiences of the international students are dismissed, silenced, or simply ignored. While many of the shared narratives paint a very negative view of how international students experience silence in the U.S.-American classroom, I also want to reiterate the many times that the participants talked about how remaining silent was an act of active engagement with the materials and/or discussion in the class, that translation took place in these moments, and that most of the time the students were performing the role of student correctly based on their cultural conditioning. Therefore,

while silence can be experienced as an oppressive force, it also can be a productive, reflective, and engaged space – which speaks to the complex, contextual, fluid, and paradoxical nature of voice and silence.

My second research question focused on how my international student participants negotiate their multiple, different experiences with voice and silence in the U.S.-American classroom setting. During data analysis, I identified three major themes that international students highlighted as ways in which they negotiate voice and silence: (1) community-building, (2) assimilation, and (3) extra work. In terms of community-building, my participants spoke about the opportunities for dialogue that are created when reaching out to fellow members of one's learning community. However, at the same time, some students drew strong lines as to whom they chose to reach out to: some of the participants felt comfortable reaching out to their U.S.-American classmates, while others felt more comfortable building friendships and finding dialogue only with fellow international students who may have had similar experiences. Some also mentioned that connecting with fellow members of their home culture offered the most comfort to them as they were able to share a common frame of reference. The complexities in the negotiation of community did have one thing in common – most international students talked about having to be the person reaching out to others and trying to engage in dialogue. In addition, the idea of community-building is also a conflictual one because reaching out to U.S.-American students to find dialogue may be a first step in creating more inclusive spaces in the U.S.-American classroom. At the same time, however, international students may be hesitant to reach out to their U.S.-American classmates because of the indifference, xenophobia, and Othering that they have experienced. Building communities among fellow international students may, therefore, be a safer and more comfortable option. Another strategy that international

students identified as a means to negotiate voice and silence within the U.S.-American classroom setting was to assimilate to U.S.-American culture. This need to fit in stems from the multiple experiences many of the participants have had with being othered and being positioned as different from the acceptable norm. Therefore, many narrated their cultural difference as something that needed to be fixed and treated as a deficiency, rather than something they could find pride in. The third strategy identified by my international student participants was taking on extra work in order to prove that we are indeed worthy of receiving an U.S.-American education and improving our English skills in order to become accepted members of the English-speaking, U.S.-American classroom. The overarching issues identified by international students in their conceptualization and negotiation of voice and silence in the U.S.-American educational setting can overwhelmingly be attributed to exclusionary pedagogical practices and hostile learning environments that are built on U.S.-centrism.

My third research question centered on how instructors understand and approach voice and silence in their classrooms within the U.S.-American classroom setting. The participating instructors in this research seemed to have a very nuanced understanding of voice and silence. They conceptualize the two as relational and as different forms of participation. The instructors seemed to understand the complexity of student silence and were transparent about their own growth process in moving away from exclusive West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and towards more inclusive and dialogic understandings of the two concepts. The participants spoke to the institutional problem within the U.S.-centric educational system that values voice over silence. They also reaffirmed many of the narratives shared by the international students during our conversations. The instructors shared similar observations when speaking about international students appearing to work very hard and being more willing to go

the extra mile in order to perform well. In addition, instructors appeared to acknowledge the value of reaffirming students' realities, as well as showing compassion and empathy for their struggles. Some expanded their understanding of what classroom participation may look like in the U.S.-American classroom in order to create spaces in which students from multiple cultural and social backgrounds may feel more included and safe to share their ideas and narratives with one another. In addition, allowing students to define their own means of participating in the classroom appeared to be one of the most compassionate and inclusive approaches articulated by one instructor. Fortunately, almost all of the instructors I interviewed prescribed to a very broad conceptualization of classroom participation that moved far beyond mere verbal contributions. Many also understood the value of silence and the multiple meanings it could hold for their students – and international students in particular – by acknowledging active listening as a positive, engaged, and productive form of participation and learning.

The purpose of my fourth research question was to create an engaged and productive dialogue among international students and instructors participating in this dissertation research. The focus of the question was on how we can reconceptualize West- and U.S.-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and create more inclusive classroom spaces. The strategies identified as ways to possibly create more inclusive spaces – now and in the future – and to incorporate more nuanced conceptualizations and embodiments of voice and silence were (1) difference and diversity, (2) cultural sensitivity, and (3) community-building. The participants called for more understanding and appreciation of the differences and diversity international students add to classrooms. In addition, the participants highlighted their belief that learning how to listen to other people and appreciating their sharing of narratives that may be different from our own, may not only be a humbling and enriching experience, but at the same

time a first step into creating dialogue among people from different and diverse backgrounds. Some also argued for an expansion of or a change to the predominantly U.S.-centric curriculum as a means to de-center privileged epistemologies and create spaces for marginalized knowledges and ways of knowing to be included. Participants also articulated the need for cultural sensitivity through accommodation by calling for U.S.-American students, as well as instructors, to show more interest and educate themselves about global issues. Additionally, allowing students to practice their agency in determining their own ways in how they learn and participate best was identified as a more humanizing approach to pedagogy, as well as a means to challenge hegemonic educational systems that place certain students at the periphery. The participants also agreed on the need for increased community-building as a means to start a dialogue across our differences that can engage all of our different ways of being and knowing. Finally, allowing students to find different ways to create communicative learning communities in which they can engage in dialogue – through voice as well as silence – aids in decentering West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and at the same time may create more inclusive learning environments within the U.S.-American educational system. Following this review of my findings, I will now briefly address the theoretical and pedagogical implications of this dissertation.

### **Theoretical Implications**

In terms of the theoretical implications we can draw from this research, I believe that the deconstruction of voice and silence as binaristic is at the core of the matter. The literature that I consulted, as well as the narratives shared by the international students and the instructors, speak strongly against the predominantly Western conception of voice and silence being total opposites. Rather, what we should take away from this research is, as previously mentioned, the

complexities and possibilities that voice and silence as concepts of inquiry have to offer. While I briefly touched on some philosophical discussions about voice and silence, I selected a specific communicative context to frame my investigation – the U.S.-American classroom setting. Malhotra and Rowe (2013) remind us that silence can – and maybe should be – conceptualized as “a space of possibility.”

Silence ... allows a space that reaches beyond linearity: the linearity to which words limit us. I consider silence a space of possibility because thoughts, ideas, explorations do not have to flow in one direction or the other. They can move and morph and change directions and hold more than one thing at once. (p. 225)

This, then, also underscores that voice and silence should be understood as fluid, constantly moving and shifting concepts that are highly contextual and intertwined. Furthermore, silence “can be a radical act of agency. Silence and voice are paradoxically one. Silence is part of all discourse, all communication” (Malhotra & Rowe, 2013, p. 51). Acknowledging and putting into context the communicative shapes and forms that silence can take when embodied by international students in the U.S.-American classroom setting was a prominent goal of this research. As the presented narratives indicate, the meanings of and reasons for international students’ embodiments of silence within classroom settings are as multiple, contextual, and dialogic as the conceptualization of silence itself. The collected data support the argument of the complexity and contextuality of voice and silence as well, and further call for a reconceptualization of voice and silence as acceptable forms of classroom participation.

This dissertation also offers further implications for the field of postcolonial studies which I briefly readdress here. The mission of postcolonial studies is to help us move away from West-centric approaches to understanding, studying, and engaging with diverse populations. It is

a critical approach to deconstructing power inequalities, domination, and oppression aimed at marginalizing people and epistemologies that are not rooted in Western modernity. In addition, one of the core commitments of postcolonial studies, arguably, is the deconstruction of binaristic thought patterns that are so prominent in the majority of Western cultures. One way of disrupting the binaries in how we produce knowledge and developing new ways of knowing is articulated in the global-local dialectic (see Mignolo, 2000; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013; Spivak, 2006). Within the context of the global-local dialectic, the argument is that local knowledges are excluded from dominant discourse and positioned at the periphery while global knowledges can be understood as the master narrative. As the discussion of my data has shown, the international students appeared to have had similar experiences when attempting to introduce their local epistemologies into classroom discussions, and oftentimes experienced being shut down or ignored. Arguably then, this dissertation supports the mission of postcolonial studies by highlighting the need to create dialogue and include the local epistemologies of international students within the dominant, U.S.-American framework. The concept of glocalization – coined by sociologist Roland Robertson – further supports this idea by insisting “the local and the global ... do not exist as cultural polarities but as mutually ‘interpenetrating’ principles” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 196). However, as my research shows, in many of the U.S.-American classrooms that my international student participants were a part of, there was still a lot of resistance to a glocalized approach to knowledge production. This resistance can be explained as a resistance to the challenging of U.S.-American privilege. As my discussions in the introductory chapters emphasized, by allowing dialogue between local and global epistemologies to take place, we could create a third space (Bhabha, 1994) that challenge preconceived notions of how we understand the world to function. For someone who has been shielded from this awareness due to



his/her privilege for his/her entire life, this can be a highly dissonant moment and something that she or he may be resistant to. I believe, however, that through dialogue –as created in this dissertation for instance – and through an empathetic approach to pedagogy, we can create gateways for having these tough conversations and moving forward in applying postcolonial theory in our everyday lives. Since I believe that one way of having these conversations is through pedagogy that includes postcolonial theory, I expand on this discussion further in the next section.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Since the communicative context I chose as the site for this project was the U.S.-American classroom of a medium-sized U.S.-American university located in a small town in the Midwestern region of the country, the pedagogical implications of this project are multiple. The international student participants shared several painful narratives during our interviews, and identified different ways in which they negotiate their struggles with being international students in the U.S.-American classroom, particularly in relation to their embodiment of silence in the classroom. The participants addressed the significance of community-building within and outside of the classroom setting in order to address their struggles. This helps them feel less like an outsider within a system that oftentimes places them at the periphery when it comes to knowledge production and ways of knowing. At the same time, however, the students also talked about how they feel pressured into leaving parts of their identities that position them as the Other behind in their attempts to assimilate into the U.S.-American educational culture. They also spoke about how they assume a lot of extra work responsibilities in order to perform at the same level as their U.S.-American classmates. At the core of many of their narratives was the inherent privileging of U.S.-American norms, examples, and ways of knowing and being:

The school system is then but one of several institutions which serve to perpetuate this structure of privilege .... Indeed, the class, sex, and race biases in schooling do not produce, but rather reflect, the structure of privilege in society at large.

(Bowles and Gintis, as cited in Bristol, 2012, p. 82)

The instructors at the same time identified the same issues, acknowledging that systemically there are still certain epistemologies that are encouraged over others. When revisiting Chapter 6 for final editing, I realized how in-sync many of the observations of the international students and the instructors were. It was almost as if the dialogue between them happened organically – I found this to be a particularly hopeful and beautiful moment personally. All of the participating parties in this research – and I do count myself here as well – appeared to agree regarding the means necessary to reconceptualize West-centric conceptualizations of voice and silence and towards the creation of more inclusive classroom settings: (1) a strong need to better understand and show appreciation for difference and diversity, (2) showing more cultural sensitivity, and (3) building stronger communities within our educational systems. It is here that I think of Bristol's (2012) words. She calls for us to:

recognise the student as an agent of change; that pedagogy is a site of struggle where teaching and learning is a shared, contested and negotiated practice of knowledge production and that education as a critical engagement is a means of grassroots activism, social formation and social transformation. (p. 12)

It is here that I would like to also highlight that while it may seem that I am offering a lot of critique of critical (communication) pedagogy (CCP) (e.g., the predominant conceptualization of silence as something negative) in this project and of the pedagogical practices derived from it, I do value the many significant contributions that CCP has provided for our educational systems

(e.g., calling for more inclusive and critical approaches to education, disrupting privileged epistemologies within U.S. contexts, etc.). At the same time, however, I do want us to be cautious of positioning CCP – and other theoretical and practical frameworks – on a pedestal that puts it beyond the reach of critique. I believe that only by continuing to dialogue and critically examining our current theoretical and practical assumptions can we push CCP further and create spaces within our educational systems that are more inclusive of all of our students (not just U.S.-American students), their different performances of classroom participation, and their multiple ways of knowing and knowledge production. As my argument in Chapter 2 emphasized, I believe that the inclusion of the tenets of postcolonial theory through a dialogic approach to pedagogical praxis can help us move towards this goal.

Over the years, we have been presented with a number of different approaches to and conceptualizations of “globalization as a world process” (Hall, 1997, p. 19). Furthermore, the ways in which diverse individuals are impacted by globalization is very different and calls into question not only the politics of difference, but also the complexities of global power dynamics. As Hall (1997) argues, we can no longer think of globalization as “a homogenizing form of cultural representation” (p. 28), but that we have to learn “to live with and work through difference” (p. 31). In an effort to emphasize the opportunities that globalization has created for educational systems, in particular, scholars have included the concepts of cosmopolitan pedagogy (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013) and pedagogy of the Other (Burney, 2012) into post-colonial discourse. As discussed in Chapter 2, cosmopolitan pedagogy is a call for the decolonization of education and knowledge production – a call that echoes with the arguments of my research participants as well. In this dissertation research, the participants – international students and instructors – pointed to U.S.-centrism as one of the main reasons as to why students

may not feel included within our educational system. Cosmopolitan pedagogy, then, is a call to create spaces in which we can move peripheral voices from the margins into the center and create dialogue between local and global epistemologies. Finally, Burney's (2012) concept of pedagogy of the Other with its key tenets of interculturalism, inclusiveness, and interdisciplinarity (compare Chapter 2) challenges the idea of multiculturalism within the U.S.-American educational system. As Warren and Toyosaki (2012) remind us:

Multicultural education ... has not challenged the ideological system that celebrates the very interpolation as a 'new' multicultural educational practice. As a result, it recenters and perpetuates the mainstream ... educational domination keeping it unchallenged and unchanged. (p. 7)

Therefore, it is imperative to move away from celebrating static multiculturalism within our educational system as it only reinforces already privileged ways of knowing and knowledge production. Rather, we should attempt to create dynamic intercultural spaces within our classrooms where we can cherish diverse narratives, epistemologies, and different ways of knowing, and different conceptualizations of voice, silence, and classroom participation. I believe that this dissertation – in particular the data presented under research question 4 – has highlighted the need to move towards the intercultural, decolonized classroom.

### **Limitations**

While this was a large-scale project especially in terms of data involved, I do want to recognize here that, of course, this project is not complete and/or exhaustive. Indeed, there are several limitations to this project that I would like to address as a means to remain accountable, transparent, and critical of myself and my work. One of the major limitations of this project is my proposed research method: As mentioned throughout this dissertation, the method I sought

out to use in this project is Critical Complete-Member Ethnography (CCME). However, there were many circumstances during the process of collecting my data, analysis, and documenting my findings that lead me to being unable to fulfill all of the methodological commitments of CCME. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the three qualitative methods that informed CCME are ethnography of communication (EOC), critical ethnography, and autoethnography. In order to remain accountable not only to my readers, but also to myself as a scholar and researcher, and to the participants who made this project possible, I want to be transparent and acknowledge that, unfortunately, I was unable to fulfill all of the commitments of CCME. As a method, EOC is “directed at the description and understanding of communicative behavior” (Saville-Troike, 1989, as cited in Toyosaki, 2011, p. 65). However, since the primary participants in this research project, namely international students, are not part of a traditional single culture and/or speech community, my research fell short of fulfilling the commitment of EOC because it focused on the participants’ voices and narratives, rather than their actual speech patterns and codes. While I fulfilled the element of qualitative interviewing that is part of critical ethnographic research, my project fell short of providing an in-depth analysis of and engagement with the data gained from my classroom observations. Several factors impacted this shortcoming: 1) the limited amount of time spent in the observed environment didn’t allow me to engage with the space as deeply as needed, 2) there was a strong disconnect between the data gathered from the interviews and the observation because I was only able to observe two of the participating international students in their respective classroom spaces, 3) the limited amount of time spent in the classrooms also didn’t allow me to build close relationships with the students in the classroom community, 4) I was unable to take into account and engage with the U.S.-American students who were part of the observed classroom communities, and 5) I didn’t actively engage and interrogate my

observations during the interviews with the instructors and the students who were part of the observed classroom communities. Therefore, only part of the necessary requirements of this methodology were fulfilled in my research project. The third and final commitment of CCME is autoethnography; my research fulfilled the methodological requirement of autoethnography by not only reflecting on the implications of membership through autoethnography, but also by adding autoethnographic reflections throughout my data analysis chapters. Therefore, while I argued that I wanted to use CCME as my main method of inquiry for this research project, my approach fell short in several areas and should be regarded as a project that employs qualitative interviewing as its main method while adding autoethnography for further critical engagement. Future researchers interested in this topic of inquiry should consider these limitations while designing their methodology.

In addition to the methodological limitations of this project, another major limitation is the number of participants as a whole – 18 international students and seven instructors. I acknowledged this limitation briefly in Chapter 3, but find it necessary to expand a little further. As I am not only making a case for theoretical reconceptualizations of voice and silence within the classroom space but at the same time am addressing pedagogical praxis, I think the arguably biggest limitation is the very small number of instructor participants. As previously mentioned, the number of instructor volunteers for this research was limited most likely due to the fact that data collection was conducted during the summer semester and that international students had to be enrolled in the class during the observations. In addition, while I attempted to make the departmental and field of study makeup of my instructor participants as diverse as possible, only instructors who personally knew me responded to my inquiry while others left my emails unanswered. Therefore, all of the participating instructors were housed within the College of

Liberal Arts of the institution examined, and only one instructor did not identify as a communication scholar. In addition, with the exception of two instructors, all of the other participants are currently teaching assistants. With these limitations in mind, one could argue that the findings in this research, as contributed by the participating instructors, may have been tremendously affected by their collegial and departmental affiliations. In addition, many of the instructors within the communication studies department self-identified as (critical) communication pedagogy scholars, meaning they had already been exposed and sensitized to much research and pedagogical praxis that tries to counter non-inclusive and hegemonic educational systems and settings. Therefore, because of the specific makeup of my instructor participants, I have to admit that I was more likely to find teachers who would practice more critical and inclusive forms of pedagogy. However, at the same time, it was heartening to see that instructors and international students seemed to identify similar issues and themes that impact how they understand, embody, negotiate, and address voice and silence within the classroom setting.

Finally, in regards to the limited number of international student participants, I would like to reiterate my argument in Chapter 3 about the qualitative validity and depth that interviews provide. The 18 students identified with a very rich variety of genders, races, ages, educational levels, areas of study, and countries of origins that can be considered, in my opinion, representative of the diverse international student body at the examined university. However, reconciliation of these limitations may have only been possible if the study would have been extended over another semester or academic year to allow for more classes to be offered as compared to the summer semester, and for more international students to be present on the university campus. I still believe that the depth and amount of collected data did provide a sound

basis for drawing valuable conclusions. In the final section of this chapter, I would like to address future directions for research that could be implemented to push this project further.

### **Future Directions**

While this chapter serves as the conclusion of this particular project at this specific moment in time, I do want to underscore that it is anything but an end to the conversations I hope this work will inspire. Additionally, this should not be a conversation just among academics but among all of the stakeholders within our educational systems. Much of the core curriculum of the U.S.-American educational system is still dictated by the departments of education at state and federal levels, which provide strict guidelines as to what should be taught and the manner it should be taught in. In addition to continuing the conversation among stakeholders within the educational system, this research has made me realize that more communication across the different disciplines needs to be happening. I attempted to create space for such communication within my document by not only bringing into dialogue postcolonial theory, critical (communication) pedagogy, and international student-centered research in Chapter 2, but also by drawing from literature in sociology, curriculum and instruction, anthropology, linguistics, teacher instruction, English-as-a-Foreign-Language, philosophy, women's studies, and communication studies in the discussion of my findings. In my opinion, this dialogue can be enriching as it may not only foster opportunities for current approaches to teaching and conceptualizations of voice and silence to be expanded, but at the same time it can also inform our current praxis and how we approach voice and silence within the classroom setting.

Another entry for future research and pedagogical praxis would be the diversification not just of the curriculum but most importantly of what types of epistemologies and narratives are included and valued within our educational systems. As many of the international students



pointed out in our interviews, much of the conversations in the U.S.-American classrooms, as well as the materials, narratives, and examples used are highly U.S.-centric, thereby excluding international students' epistemologies and ways of knowing and knowledge production. This, according to them, is a contributing factor to international students feeling silenced and not valued within the educational system. Therefore, as instructors and/or pedagogues we should attempt to make our classrooms more inclusive by encouraging students to share their narratives, by promoting intercultural exchange among students, and by moving away from U.S.-centrism in the examples and narratives we highlight. Postcolonial theory, and particularly postcolonial pedagogy research, I argue, offer many different entry points to this matter in particular:

A relationship between postcolonial theory, culture and education is intended to help teachers in societies with a history of oppression apprehend their practice in an historical context and begin to change it. What this means in practice is that teachers who teach with a critical historical/cultural awareness of their practice circumstances are able, in community with students and peers, to teach against ideas which continue to maintain practices of intellectual dependency, oppression and social injustice. (Bristol, 2012, p. 31)

Bristol (2012) reminds us that many of our educational systems today – particularly the ones established through colonial rule in countries with a history of colonialism (including the U.S.) – still perpetuate a system of oppression and exclusion in which certain epistemologies and ways of knowledge production are encouraged, while others are excluded entirely because they do not match the master narrative. Postcolonial theory and postcolonial pedagogy, therefore, make valuable contributions and offer ways in which we can be more inclusive and understanding in our pedagogical praxis especially when it comes to voice and silence. In addition, postcolonial

theory deconstructs binaristic thinking underscored by the West and emphasizes the benefits and necessity of dialogic efforts.

The task at hand for current and future educators appears to be overwhelming, but I also want to emphasize that social change on a larger scale doesn't happen overnight but gradually and sometimes in micro moments. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) point out:

We understand that we are asking much of teacher educators, teachers, and students, inducing them to go beyond typical educational practice. We also understand that there are a multitude of forces that are working and will work to thwart such efforts. Nevertheless, our vision of critical pedagogical and political frontiers calls us to redefine human progress in new non-colonial, non-oppressive ways that celebrate democracy, social/economic justice, new levels of cognitive understanding, and innovative community building. (p. 21)

Many teachers, and some of the teachers I interviewed for this project, are already doing the work by acknowledging students' different ways of knowing and allowing them the agency to co-construct their learning experiences by creating inclusive classroom spaces in which students can feel comfortable to communicate in their own ways, through voice, silence, and/or listening. This gives me hope that some change is starting to happen and that we are having these important conversations. Yet, as the international students pointed out, there are still many ways that we can improve, be more understanding, and create more inclusive spaces in our globalizing classrooms. Therefore, I believe that we must continue these important conversations across the system, across the different disciplines, and amongst all of the stakeholders interested in creating positive and inclusive learning environments for all of our students in an increasingly interconnected world.

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## APPENDICES



**Appendix A**  
**COVER LETTER**

Date: 02/05/2015

Dear Participant:

I am a Doctoral Student of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve one 20 minute to 1 hour, tape-recorded interview asking about your opinions on and experiences with silence, voice, absence, and/or presence. I would like to find out how you understand these concepts, how you have experienced them, and how you have negotiated them within the U.S. American context as a student and individual. Interviews will be transcribed, and all identification units (such as your name) will be changed or deleted. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept safe at my apartment, and destroyed once the study is completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be absolutely no effect on your relationship with Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The interview will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (618) 525-3645 or email me at [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu).

Sincerely,

Jana Simonis  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Phone: (618) 525-3645  
Email: [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu)

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)**

## Appendix B

### **Research Project Interview Protocol for International Students**

1. Background information
  - a. Gender
  - b. Age
  - c. Home culture
  - d. Major
2. How long have you studied in the United States?
3. How long have you been a student at SIU?
4. How have you experienced coming to the United States as an international student and functioning within an academic framework?
5. What struggles have you encountered as an international student in the USA?
6. How have you negotiated these struggles?
7. How would you describe the other students in your classes?
8. How would you define the climate/learning environment created in your classes?
9. How do you understand/define silence?

10. How do you understand/define voice?
11. How have you experienced any of these concepts in a U.S. classroom setting?
12. How have your experiences with these concepts in the U.S. differed from the ones in your home culture?
13. How have you negotiated them (differently)?
14. How did it make you feel?
15. How have instructors reacted to you performing silence in the classroom?
16. How did their reaction make you feel?
17. How have you experienced these concepts outside of the U.S. classroom setting?
18. How was it different from the classroom?
19. Who supported you in your negotiation of these struggles?
20. If you could make a change that would make you feel more included/appreciated in the US classroom setting, what would you change? If anything.
21. Comments:

## APPENDIX C CONSENT FORM

My name is Jana Simonis and I am a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

I am asking you to participate in my research study. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, it will take approximately 60 minutes of your time for one interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary, and will not affect your relationship with SIUC if you choose not to participate. You may withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any question at any time during the interviews without penalty. You may also conclude your participation at any time without penalty. All your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data. The tapes and transcriptions will be kept secure at my apartment until the conclusion of this research and then the tapes will be erased.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me Jana Simonis at:  
Department of Communication Studies, Mail Code 6605  
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Carbondale, IL 62901 Telephone: (618) 525-3645

or my advisor Nilanjana Bardhan, Ph. D. at:  
Department of Communication Studies  
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Carbondale, IL 62901 Telephone: (618) 453-1891

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

I have read the information above, and any questions I asked were answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be recorded on audio-tape. I understand that this tape will be used for scholarly and academic purposes only, and that my identity will be protected in any presentation of this tape or transcripts of it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)**

Appendix D  
 CONSENT FOR A/V TAPING  
 (Signatures of participants required)

Consent to Participate in Research

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research project conducted by Jana Simonis, Doctoral Student of Communication Studies.

I understand the purpose of this study is to explore notions of voice, silence, absence, and presence within U.S. American classroom settings.

I understand my participation is strictly voluntary and I may refuse to answer any question without penalty. I am also informed that my participation will last between 1 and 2 hours.

I understand that my responses to the questions will be audiotaped, and that these tapes will be transcribed/stored and kept for 120 days in a safe file cabinet. Afterward, these tapes will be destroyed.

I understand questions or concerns about this study are to be directed to Jana Simonis, (618) 525-3645, or jana.simonis@siu.edu.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be tape recorded. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers.

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ to have my responses recorded on audio tape.”

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ that Jana Simonis may quote me in her paper”

---

Participant signature and date

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu**

**Appendix E**  
Solicitation Material for International Students

Dear SIUC International Student:

I am a Doctoral Student of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

I am currently seeking interview participants. Interview participants must be international students who have been students at SIUC for at least 1 full semester. Participation will involve one 20 minute to 1 hour, tape-recorded interview asking about your opinions on and experiences with silence, voice, absence, and/or presence. I would like to find out how you understand these concepts, how you have experienced them, and how you have negotiated them within the U.S. American context as a student and individual. The interviews will be transcribed, and all identification units (such as your name) will be changed or deleted. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept safe at my apartment, and destroyed once the study is completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be absolutely no effect on your relationship with Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The interview will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (618) 525-3645 or email me at [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu).

Thank you for taking time to assist me in this research. If there is another person in your department or in the University you feel would be interested in participating in this study, feel free to forward this message to that individual.

Sincerely,

Jana Simonis  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Phone: (618) 525-3645  
Email: [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu)

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)**

**Appendix F**  
Solicitation Email International Students from ISS representative

From: Elaine Conrad (econrad@siu.edu)  
To: INTLFALL-L@LISTSERV.SIU.EDU  
Subject: Dissertation Research: Participation Request  
Attachment: Appendix E

Dear International Students:

Please see the attachment below regarding a voluntary research request from a fellow international student. If you are willing to participate please contact her with the contact information provided in the attachment.

Sincerely,

Elaine Conrad  
Education and Community Programs Coordinator  
International Students and Scholars  
NW Annex Wing B - Mail Code 4333  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Carbondale, Illinois 62901  
Telephone: (618) 453-5774  
Fax: (618) 453-7660  
E-mail: econrad@siu.edu

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu**

**Appendix G**  
Solicitation Material ISS Representative

TO: Elaine Conrad (econrad@siu.edu)

Subject: Dissertation Research: Participation Request

Attachment: Appendix E, Appendix F

Dear Ms Conrad:

I am a Doctoral Student of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

I am contacting you to request your participation, which will involve sending an email to all international students asking them for their participation in my research. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be absolutely no effect on your relationship with Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (618) 525-3645 or email me at jana.simonis@siu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jana Simonis  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Phone: (618) 525-3645  
Email: jana.simonis@siu.edu

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu**



## Appendix H

**Research Project Observation Framework (Classroom)**

1. Description of scene
  - a. Number of participants in attendance
  - b. Description of students involved (age, gender, etc)
  - c. Description of setting (are students relaxed or tense? How are people seated? Who is participating?)
2. How often do students have the teacher explain a topic again? How often do students ask the teacher to repeat a question or explanation?
3. Types of behavior observed? What kinds of languages are being used? What nonverbals do you see?
4. How would you describe the climate of the classroom?
5. Are some students more vocal than others? Why do you think this might be?
6. Do some students appear more absent or present than others?
7. Do some students get more attention from the teacher than others?

8. Are students being called out for not participating verbally in the class?
9. Describe the level of comfort in the social setting exhibited by participants.
10. General information/areas of interest to be noted
11. Relevant comments/notes
12. Interpretations of observations

## Appendix I

### **Research Project Interview Protocol (Teacher/Instructor)**

1. Background information
  - a. Gender
  - b. Age
  - c. Home culture
  - d. Field of Study
2. How long have you been a teacher/instructor at SIUC?
3. How would you describe the climate of the class you are teaching?
4. Do you feel comfortable in your role as a teacher?
5. How would you describe your teaching style?
6. How do perceive international students in your classrooms?
7. How do you understand voice and silence?
8. How do you pedagogically approach voice and silence?
9. How do you pedagogically approach students who practice forms of voice and silence?
10. How do you pedagogically approach students who practice forms of absence and presence?
11. Comments:

## APPENDIX J

### CONSENT FORM - Instructors

My name is Jana Simonis and I am a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

I am asking you to participate in my research study. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, it will take approximately 5 hours of your time for two classroom observations at different times in the semester and one interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary, and will not affect your relationship with SIUC if you choose not to participate. You may withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any question at any time during the interviews without penalty. You may also conclude your participation at any time without penalty. All your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data. The tapes and transcriptions will be kept secure at my apartment until the conclusion of this research and then the tapes will be erased.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me Jana Simonis at:  
 Department of Communication Studies, Mail Code 6605  
 Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
 Carbondale, IL 62901 Telephone: (618) 525-3645

or my advisor Nilanjana Bardhan, Ph. D. at:  
 Department of Communication Studies  
 Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
 Carbondale, IL 62901 Telephone: (618) 453-1891

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

I have read the information above, and any questions I asked were answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be recorded on audio-tape. I understand that this tape will be used for scholarly and academic purposes only, and that my identity will be protected in any presentation of this tape or transcripts of it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)**

**Appendix K**  
COVER LETTER - Instructors

Date: 02/05/2015

Dear Participant:

I am a Doctoral Student of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am conducting a research study in which I am exploring the negotiation of voice, silence, absence and presence and how these are experienced and negotiated by international students in a U.S. American classroom setting.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve one 20 minute to 1 hour, tape-recorded interview asking about your opinions on and experiences with silence, voice, absence, and/or presence. I would like to find out how you understand these concepts, how you have experienced them, and how you have negotiated them pedagogically within the U.S. American context as an instructor. Interviews will be transcribed, and all identification units (such as your name) will be changed or deleted. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept safe at my apartment, and destroyed once the study is completed.

Additionally, I am asking for the opportunity to conduct two observations of your classroom. Areas of observation would involve such aspects as how international students practice voice and silence in the classroom setting, how absence and presence are negotiated, and how the instructor approaches and negotiates these concepts pedagogically.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be absolutely no effect on your relationship with Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The interview will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (618) 525-3645 or email me at [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu).

Sincerely,

Jana Simonis  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Phone: (618) 525-3645  
Email: [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu)

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)**

## Appendix L FACEBOOK POST

Date: 03/01/2015

Hello friends,

if you identify as an international student who is at least 18 years of age, who has attended classes at a U.S. American university for at least one full semester, and who would like to help me out with my dissertation research please read my research request and contact me at your earliest convenience:

I am currently seeking interview participants. Interview participants must be international students who have been students at SIUC for at least 1 full semester. Participation will involve one 20 minute to 1 hour, tape-recorded interview asking about your opinions on and experiences with silence, voice, absence, and/or presence. I would like to find out how you understand these concepts, how you have experienced them, and how you have negotiated them within the U.S. American context as a student and individual. The interviews will be transcribed, and all identification units (such as your name) will be changed or deleted. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept safe at my apartment, and destroyed once the study is completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be absolutely no effect on your relationship with Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The interview will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (618) 525-3645 or email me at [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu).

Thank you for taking time to assist me in this research. If there is another person in your department or in the University you feel would be interested in participating in this study, feel free to forward this message to that individual.

Sincerely,

Jana Simonis  
 Doctoral Student  
 Department of Communication Studies  
 Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
 Phone: (618) 525-3645  
 Email: [jana.simonis@siu.edu](mailto:jana.simonis@siu.edu)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## VITA

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University

Jana Simonis

jana.simonis87@gmail.com

Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz  
Bachelor of Arts, Translation Studies, July 2009

Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Master of Arts, Speech Communication, May 2012

Special Honors and Awards:

Graduate and Professional Student Council “GPSC Cares” Award, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, December 2015.

Mary Wakeland Scholarship Award, Center for International Education, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, June 2015.

Gustav Friedrich Top Student Paper Award, Central States Communication Association (CSCA), April 2015.

Preliminary Examination Pass with Distinction, Department of Communication Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, October 2014.

Dissertation Title:

Voice and Silence Among International Students in the U.S. American Classroom: Towards a Dialogic and Inclusive Approach to Voice, Silence, and Active Listening

Major Professor: Dr. Nilanjana R. Bardhan

Publications:

**Simonis, J.** (2014, August 5). The global-local dialectic. *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, 26. Retrieved from: <http://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/2014/08/05/key-concept-26-global-local-dialectic-by-jana-simonis/>

Sobré-Denton, M.S., & **Simonis, J.** (2012). Do you talk to your teacher with that mouth? F\*ck: A documentary and profanity as a teaching tool in the communication classroom. *Communication Teacher*, 26(3), 178-193.